

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

University of 8 Mai 1945 / Guelma  
Faculty of Letters & Languages  
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جامعة 8 ماي 1945 / قالمة  
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قسم الآداب واللغة الإنجليزية



## US Presidents' Use of Religious Rhetoric to Legitimate their Political Actions: The Case of George W. Bush

A Dissertation Submitted to the Department of Letters and English Language in Partial  
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master's Degree in Anglophone Language,  
Literatures, and Civilizations

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June 2017

## **Acknowledgments**

I would never have been able to finish my work without the support of several people who have helped and motivated me throughout this journey. As a recognition, I would like to thank my supervisor Prof. TOULGUI LADI whose efforts, helpfulness, and insight have been beyond comparison. Having introduced me to the topic and continued to offer helpful feedback at every stage until the completion of this research project reflect his determination and involvement to make the student sweat but eventually well rewarded – the sought result - because of hard work.

I would like to thank the examining committee members for generously offering some of their precious time to read and review my work.

I owe a lot to my family members who have encouraged me at every stage in my academic life, especially my parents and my aunt. Finally, I should not forget to thank my two brothers, Belkacem and Samir, my two sisters, Ahlem and Sameh, my nieces Imen, Jana, and Meriem, and my nephew Haythem.



## **Dedication**

I dedicate my humble work to my beloved aunt. I owe her a special debt of gratitude for her support and encouragement.

## **Abstract**

The topic of this dissertation deals with American religious rhetoric that is used by US presidents to influence the public opinion and gain the support of the American citizen. Although it was wise from the Founding Fathers to insist on the separation between state and religion that is embodied in the Church in the USA, the two are inextricably associated. It is understood from the fundamental perspective of this dissertation that US chief executives took advantage of this fact, using religious rhetoric as a tool to gain and consolidate power, as well as implement their political agendas, especially those related to external crises. In this research, President Bush's religious rhetoric is used as a case study because of his emergence during a sensitive period, and therefore requires extensive analysis and discussion. The objective behind the case is to know whether President George W. Bush used different biblical references as well as religious symbols in his speeches; whether the adoption of religious symbols reflect truly his religious convictions or is merely a political strategy, with an emphasis on the post-9/11 period speeches. It can be concluded from this study that in most situations the president used religious rhetoric deliberately to follow the line of his predecessors in pursuit of partisan gains. However, it is very likely that the nature of US presidents' religious faith and its impact on politics will remain controversial and this is due to the lack of transparency of their true religious vision.

## ملخص

يتطرق موضوع هذه المذكرة إلى مدى استعمال الخطاب الديني من طرف رؤساء الولايات الأمريكية من أجل التأثير السياسي على الرأي العام والحصول على تأييد الواطن الأمريكي. حرص المؤسسون الأوائل بكل حكمة على الفصل بين الدولة والدين الممثل في الكنيسة، إلا أن هذان الأخيران ادمجا معا بشكل يستحيل الفصل بينهما. يفهم من المنظور الأساسي لهذه المذكرة هو استغلال الرؤساء التنفيذيين في الولايات المتحدة لهذه الحقيقة حيث استخدموا اللغة الدينية كأداة لكسب وتوطيد السلطة وكذا تطبيق البرامج السياسية خاصة تلك التي لها علاقة بالأزمات الخارجية. اتخذ هذا البحث خطاب الرئيس ج. و. بوش كدراسة حالة نظرا لظهوره في فترة حساسة، ولذلك استوجب تحليله ومناقشته. الهدف من ذلك هو معرفة ما إذا كان الرئيس جورج بوش قد وظف مختلف الإشارات المستنبطة من الكتاب المقدس وكذا الرموز الدينية في خطابه، و معرفة ما إذا كانت تلك الرموز معتقدات دينية حقيقية أم هي مجرد إستراتيجية سياسية، مع التأكيد على الخطابات التي تلت أحداث الحادي عشر من سبتمبر 2001. يمكن الاستنتاج من هذه الدراسة أن الرئيس في معظم الحالات يستخدم الخطاب الديني عمدا، متبعا سلفه ممن استعملوا الخطاب السياسي الأمريكي سعيا لتحقيق مكاسب حزبية. إلا أنه من المرجح جدا أن تظل طبيعة إيمان الرؤساء الديني وميزة تأثيره على الأعمال السياسية مثيران للخلاف والجدل وهذا يرجع إلى عدم اتضاح رؤية التدين الحقيقية لديهم.

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## **Introduction**

The United States is known by its separation of government institutions and political leaders who are mandated to represent the state from religion institutions and religious dignitaries in order to make the best environment for all the citizens. This nation is among the few ones in the world that avoid an established state religion. Even in a constitutional sense, it is strictly secular. The framers of the Constitution were careful to set up a division between church and state which is clear in the establishment clause of the First Amendment that states, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion”. It means that the overall purpose of the Establishment Clause is to put a wall between church and state. However, church-state separation is at once simple in concept and irredeemably complex in practice and the influence of religion in politics is evident throughout the world, including the US as a secular nation.

One cannot overlook the influence of basic Christian principles on the US system of government, the impact of religious beliefs on prominent politicians’ behaviors and actions while dealing with issues of policy matters. Some American presidents have clearly been more influenced by Christian values than others, although every president has been directed, even if to some extent, by such basic religious tenet, this is evident in presidents’ use of religious rhetoric and explicitly Christian language in national addresses.

One obvious example of a president who has championed his private values as a guiding force in his public decision-making is former President George W. Bush. He is one of the most openly “religious” figures in public life in the world. The religious language became a hallmark of his public communications. President Bush’s religious rhetoric is more pronounced and more political than that of perhaps any modern president. His public speeches routinely weave theological principles with biblical references and religious images, eliciting praise from some corners and harsh criticism from others.

The choice of the topic is generally motivated by a desire to build a full understanding of one of the most important factors in American politics; that is the role played by religious references and rhetoric in US politics. This research needs to be conducted because the issue of religion in US politics triggered a heated debate since it is really vast and complex in nature. It is worthwhile to explore the role religious rhetoric plays in the United States seemingly a secular nation, since every American president has been guided by such religious tenets, even if slightly, which may affect decision making and the nation's foreign policy.

It is intended to explain in this dissertation project how American politics and religion are linked even though the First Amendment of the Constitution emphasizes their separation. The research work will examine the presence of religious influence on the presidential elections and political decisions of America's leaders. It will equally introduce a special forum on rhetoric and religion in contemporary politics, by examining a subset of presidential religious rhetoric.

This study will profoundly examine and provide answers to the following questions: What is the role of religion in US politics? How did the United States become a secular nation? How do American presidents use religious rhetoric? Is the use of religious rhetoric by Presidents effective? Does it help them achieve their goals? Why or why not? How often and in what context did Bush refer to religion in his speeches? Did George W. Bush employ religious rhetoric simply for political advantages? Did George W. Bush's religious rhetoric increase in the events following September 11, 2001?

The topic under discussion is among the other phenomena that create a shakeup in views among researchers, scholars, and experts. Before this study can be further expanded, and to display more its importance, it is necessary to expose the literature review by focusing on some previous works that investigated the subject of the impact of religion on US politics with a particular emphasis on presidents' use of religious language as well as the need to

mention some definitions and views provided by some important politicians, researchers, and scholars.

In the same context, Kerney Scott in his article “Religion and US Foreign Policy: Two Presidents and Two Perspectives”, discusses the influence of America’s Christian principles on the system of government and how some of the American presidents have been clearly influenced by such basic religious tenets. Two such Presidents are Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush whose traditional and evangelical Christian upbringings, respectively, impacted their behavior as Presidents and their actions in dealing with foreign policy issues.

*The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon*, written by David Domke and Kevin Coe, is among the major studies employed in this dissertation. This book gives the readers insight into the mix of religion and politics and demonstrates how deeply imbedded religion has become in modern American politics. The authors examine the public addresses of US presidents over 75 years. Therefore, they confirm that starting with the 1980 elections of Ronald Reagan, American presidents used “the God Strategy” as a partisan weapon to attract voters, recognize enemies, and consolidate power.

In his thesis, “God Wills: Presidents and the Political Use of Religion,” political scientist, David O’Connell, examines how US presidents use religious rhetoric to advance their policies claiming that post WWII American presidents employed less religious language than many scholars recognize, because they return to this kind of language only after other types of arguments have failed. He affirms that presidents in earlier periods used religion in their political discourses more frequently and successfully. This work contains much important analysis of how, when, and why post-World War II presidents used religious language to help accomplish significant political objectives.

As the study will give a thorough analysis to the issue of religion in US politics and the impact of religious rhetoric on such secular society, it is important to examine the book

titled *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush*, by Smith Gary who takes a look at the role religion has played in presidential politics and policies. He examines the lives of eleven presidents and reveals that despite their differences, their faith has been vitally important to them; a substantial number of the occupants of the Oval Office wanted God on their sides to help them legitimate their actions and accomplish their political objectives.

Brett Lunceford examines the subject of religion in the United States in his article “Rhetoric and Religion in Contemporary Politics” where he explains that religion and politics have long been interrelated in the United States. He focuses on rhetoric and religion in the current political landscape through discussing some recent events and explores how these events relate to religious discourse or practice. Jeff Manza, professor of sociology, in his article entitled “The Religious Factor in US Presidential Elections, 1960–1992”, analyzes the relationship between religion and political behavior in presidential elections in the United States. According to him the importance of the separation between religion and politics in the United States has declined during the nine presidential elections between 1960 and 1992.

Literature that tackles this critical issue will continue to be produced as long as the debate is still going on. The development of the present topic will be based in part on information provided in the books and articles mentioned above.

The subject of religion is very sensitive especially when it is linked to the game of politics. Hence, it requires a depth policy analysis, which will be based on argumentative and interpretative methods. Historical analyses will be used in this present work as well. It envelops the chronological progress of the fusion of religion and politics. Moreover, the use of discourse analysis can further help in reporting and analyzing the speeches delivered by some important politicians, researchers, and particularly presidents.

The dissertation will include three chapters. The first chapter entitled “Highlighting

the Role of Religion in US Politics”, deals in its first part with the historical development of the religious dimension in US political system, which is the best way to put the work in its historical context, because the historical and political events that happened may give a clear idea about the reasons behind presidents’ use of religious language, then presenting how the United States became a secular nation. While the second part of the chapter explores the importance of the religious belief and practice in the United States and the huge influence religion has on US politicians, mainly presidents. The chapter eventually concludes with analysis of the role of religious factor in determining voting behavior in America.

Under the title “When US Presidents Politicize Religious Rhetoric”, the second chapter aims to reveal how and why US presidents use the religious rhetoric during their presidency, with the objective of recognizing the rhetorical devices that speechwriters and politicians employ in their public addresses. The chapter also includes some definitions on rhetoric, its kinds, and functions since it is the focus of this part.

The third chapter is the core of analysis in this work, entitled “Reflecting the Use of Religious Rhetoric in the Case of George W. Bush: Political Hypocrisy or False Piety?” Here President George W. Bush’s religious rhetoric will be put under scrutiny. The chapter examines how President George W. Bush used this kind of language in his public addresses, through analyzing different passages in which he appealed to religion, especially in the post 9/11 era.

## **Chapter One**

### **Highlighting the Role of Religion in US Politics**

Religious belief and practice remain vibrant in the United States, despite the separation of church and state. The present chapter is devoted to the religious aspect in US politics and provides a brief account of brief history and current controversies over religious disestablishment. It explains the role religion has been playing in the US politics and the intense power religion possesses and influence it can exert over individuals, particularly political candidates. This is reflected in their campaigns and speeches.

The chapter initiates with the constitutional context in order to present how the United States is a secular nation. This includes explanation of the separation of church and state, and provides the most important documents throughout US history to confirm that the United States is not in any sense a religious nation. The work progresses by shedding light on the contradiction of US politics, through revealing the importance of US presidents' religious affiliations in a country where the separation of church and state is manifest.

The chapter eventually addresses the issue of religion in the US presidential elections and focuses on the use of explicit appeals to religious voters by candidates in American presidential primary elections, whether by explicit references to religion or by explicit references to political issues that is deeply connected to religion. Then, a careful analysis of how political leaders have employed religious signaling in their public communications in pursuit of partisan gain in order to understand the rhetoric of today's America used by politicians and their speechwriters (Bradberry).

#### **1.1 The US Constitutional Background**

In the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, the New World served as an outlet for European religious unrest. The United States was an opportunity for minority religious communities to build a bit of heaven on earth. In the beginning, the colonies, dominated by different religious

traditions, dotted the shoreline, each not terribly tolerant of the other. For instance, the Puritans of Massachusetts were not welcoming mainly by the Catholics of Maryland or the Quakers of Pennsylvania. However, pockets of limited tolerance steadily developed (Jelen and Wilcox, "Religion and Politics..." 435).

The period from 1776 to 1791 the "founding moment" is exceptional in American history. It was characterized by the American Revolutionary War (1776-1783), and political chaos and disorder since each colony acted as an independent country and drafted its own state constitution. In addition, at that time there were more than 10 denominations in the United States with significant followings (Finke and Starke). At the time of revolution, in almost all the thirteen colonies, public offices were reserved mainly for Protestants and they had religious tests in order to ban Catholics, agnostics Jews, Unitarians, freethinkers, and atheists from holding public office in all the colonies or even serving on juries in most states ("Separation of Church and State").

Some American colonies refused the clerical rule, separated the responsibilities of ministers and judges from religion. However, other colonies established churches and imposed different religious regulations on all citizens. The Articles of Confederation were ratified in 1781 as the first effort to find the best form of government suitable for all the Americans, once the articles were abandoned, a decision was undertaken to create a secular government (Gaskins and Clifford, "America is Becoming more Secular...").

### **1.1.1 Understanding the Separation of Church and State**

The United States is the first nation which eschewed an established state religion in 1791 ("Meaning of Establishment of Religion..."). Consequently, the government cannot endorse or support any religion or promote one at the expense of the other. Besides, it is prohibited from compelling prayer or adoration, appointing religious leaders, or defining creedal statements of faith. This arrangement often called by scholars "disestablishment" and

usually known in the United States as the “separation of church and state,” (“Separation of Church and State”) it also applies to all religious institutions of any kind whether churches, synagogues, mosques, etc.

The two short clauses of the First Amendment to the Constitution “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” often referred to as the “the free exercise clause” or “establishment clause” has been the focus of vast amount of scholarly analysis and much litigation. For instance, some legal scholars have written entire articles on specific words, such as what it means to ban laws about an establishment of religion.

Although the Founding Fathers did not anticipate the special diversity of modern American religion, they did worry about the threats of religious conflict and the consequences of making Christianity the dominant religion in the US even though the vast majority of Americans have always been Christians. A wall of separation between the two institutions has been ingrained in the American mind. However, the First Amendment does not give an explicit definition for the separation of church and state (Jelen and Wilcox, “Religion and Politics...” 445). President Thomas Jefferson is the one who first coined the phrase in 1802. He wrote, “...I contemplate with sovereign reverence that act of the whole American people which declared that their legislature should make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; thus building a *wall of separation between church and state*” [emphasis added] (“Jefferson’s Letter to the Danbury Baptists”), the included phrase is supported by the public but does not appear to be fully understood.

There is a little agreement as to what the establishment clause means. Some accommodationists propose that the establishment clause allows the government to set up rules and policies that support all religions or perhaps Christianity in general, under their point of view, generic prayer would be permitted, but prayers in public schools of specific



denominations would be banned (Jelen and Wilcox, *Public Attitude toward Church*).

Separationists believe that the establishment clause bans the government from supporting religion in general, and the government has to be neutral in both between religions and between religious and less religious citizens (Jelen). They commonly cite the call of Jefferson for a “high wall of separation” between church and state.

Jefferson particularly wished to avoid the domination of a single religion and argued that the separation is “meant to comprehend, within the mantle of its protection, the Jew and the Gentile, the Christian and the Mohammeden, the Hindoo and Infidel of every denomination” (qtd. in Schweltzer, “Founding Fathers...”). John Adams who helped in founding the country would definitely know on what principles the nation was founded. While signing the Treaty of Tripoli in 1797, he said, “The government of the United States is not, in any sense, founded on the Christian religion” (qtd. in “Treaty of Tripoli”).

The First Amendment did not reach its present importance in American culture and law until the 1940s, which means one hundred and fifty years after its ratification. The landmark decision of the United States Supreme Court in the case of *Everson v. Board of Education* (1947) marked a turning point in the interpretation and application of disestablishment law in the modern era. In this case Justice Hugo Black defined the First Amendment religious clause in terms of a “wall of separation between church and state”. He says:

The “establishment of religion” clause of the First Amendment means at least this: Neither a state nor the Federal Government can set up a church. Neither can pass laws which aid one religion, aid all religions, or prefer one religion over another. . . . No person can be punished for entertaining or professing religious beliefs or disbeliefs, for church attendance or nonattendance. No tax in any amount, large or small, can be levied to support any religious activities

or institutions, whatever they may be called, or whatever form they may adopt to teach or practice religion. (“*Everson v. Board of Education*”)

The separation of church and state has been firmly established as a Supreme Court doctrine since the *Everson* decision in 1947, as well as having thoroughly penetrated the culture of the United States as a commonly accepted concept.

### **1.1.2 Governmental Documents Proclaim Secular Nation**

The four most important documents in the history of the United States excluded any reference to religion. The Declaration of Independence in 1776, the Articles of Confederation of 1777, the US Constitution (1787), and the *Federalist Papers* (1787-1788) are purely secular documents.

The most important affirmation in the Declaration of Independence (1776) is that “to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.” This means that the power of government is derived from the people and not from God. In this document, there is no reference at all to higher powers, such as creator or Supreme judge of the world and never implying a role for a God in the US government. This concept is famous as “popular sovereignty,” that President Abraham Lincoln would prominently describe almost a hundred years later as “Government of the people, by the people and for the people” (“*Separation of Church and State*”).

The authors of the Articles of Confederation (1777) also gave no authority to religion in political matters and at the same time they disallowed any authority of government in matters of faith. Hence, it was the first sight into the separation of church and state. In all 13 articles, religion was given no authority or power, the only reference to God is “Great Governor of the World,” (Schweitzer, “*Founding Fathers...*”) used once as general introduction just like “Ladies and gentlemen.”

It is evident that the US Constitution (1787) contains no mention of religion or god

except for the First Amendment that states “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof,” and the Article VI which is anyway a negative reference that prohibits religious tests for public office when it says, “No religious Test shall ever be required as a Qualification to any Office or public Trust under the United States”(Schweitzer, “Founding Fathers...”). Both of these provisions are evidence that the country was not founded as officially Christian.

Finally, in the collection of essays of the *Federalist Papers*(1787-88), the Founding Fathers; John Jay, Alexander Hamilton and James Madison discussed religion only to make sure that America is not a Christian nation and religious matters should be separate from political affairs. At no time is Christianity or a God ever mentioned in the *Federalist Papers* because the Founding Fathers believed that religion has no role in government (Schweitzer, “Founding Fathers...”).

The founding generation stresses the fact that they did not erect a Christian nation polity, affirming explicitly that “the United States of America is not in any sense founded on the Christian Religion.” This declaration is mentioned in the treaty with the Barbary States, which was ratified by the Senate in June, 1797 (Edwards). It was negotiated during the presidential term of George Washington, and was ratified as John Adams, his hand-picked successor, held office (Pestana). It offers direct and clear evidence that the United States is not a Christian nation.

Numerous groups were formed during the mid-1800s to reject secularism and to rectify the mistake made by the Founding Fathers in founding the country on principles of secularism rather than faith. The best example is the National Reform Association (1863) which was seeking for the acknowledgement of Jesus Christ and God as the sources of government power through amending the preamble of the Constitution (DeMar).

The National Reform Association believed that the Civil War was divine punishment

to the Americans for failing to mention God into the Constitution. Hence, in their convention in 1864, they presented a preamble that would replace “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union...” with “Recognizing Almighty God as the source of all authority and power in civil government, and acknowledging the Lord Jesus Christ as the governor among the nations, his revealed will as the supreme law of the land, in order to constitute a Christian government...” (“The US was not Founded on Christianity”). The National Reform Association’s suggestion was immediately rejected by President Lincoln and the Congress dodged the proposal but accepted to put “In God We Trust” on the currency (Schweitzer, “Founding Fathers...”).

The phrase “In God We Trust” was first placed in US coins in 1861 and when Teddy Roosevelt tried to remove the words from the money, he was shouted down in 1907 (Schweitzer, “The Church of America”). Only in 1954, the clause “Under God” was inserted in the Pledge of Allegiance when President Dwight D Eisenhower signed legislation to recognize “the dedication of our Nation and our people to the Almighty” (Piereson). He argued that, “in this way we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America’s heritage and future; in this way we shall constantly strengthen those spiritual weapons which forever will be our country’s most powerful resource in peace and war” (Dwight D. Eisenhower). The following year, Congress proclaimed that the phrase “In God We Trust” must be put on every bill and every coin. The same phrase was adopted as the national motto in 1956 (“President Eisenhower Signs ‘In God we Trust’ into Law”).

## **1.2 Religious Influence on US Politics**

Secularism is taking place rapidly in numerous countries in the world, and despite the fact that this tendency looks like associated and connected to the process of economic development, nonetheless religion continues to be a significant political phenomenon throughout the world for several reasons. Even the most secularized societies include

considerable numbers of people who still identify themselves as devout (Callaway).

Despite all the constitutional provisions, religion is a central force to American politics that influences and mobilizes people, a force capable of forming or shaping human behavior. It remains a pervasive influence on American politics, public policy and culture (“Separation of Church and State”). Jean Bethke Elshtain, an American ethicist, political philosopher and public intellectual, argues that “Separation of church and state is one thing. Separation of religion and politics is another thing altogether. Religion and politics flow back and forth in American civil society all the time, always have, always will. How could it be otherwise?” (qtd. in Dionne XII).

On religion, William James says in his book *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, that “The best fruits of religious experience are the best things that history has to show....The highest flights of charity, devotion, trust, patience, bravery to which the wings of human nature have spread themselves have been flown for religious ideals” (259-260). However, not all perspectives on the purpose of religion are as rosy as James’. Bertrand Russell describes religion as an illness, effect of panic and as a cause of untold sadness to the human race (Scott).

The role of religion in the American political affairs challenges various traditional understandings. Americans remain noticeably devout, in a time when the citizens of Christian-majority countries are becoming more and more secular. Americans’ religious life is noticeably diverse, and the competition between religious groups seeking for voice and adherents in public life is usually strong and simultaneously nonviolent and even friendly, in a world where many countries have established religious monopolies and others experience considerable conflict between religious groups (Jelen and Wilcox, “Religion and Politics...” 433). The US is best known for the “separation of church and state,” in which religion implies itself into politics in complex, countless ways (433).

Historically, the role of religion has been overlooked or found less analytically important for centuries; only in the 21<sup>st</sup> century that scholars started to recognize its important role and that it could contribute to decision making. Therefore, religion should become part of the logical focus in understanding a state's foreign policy, diplomacy or international relations since religion has been, and definitely still is, a fundamental element of international dealings (Shuriye). The role of religion in the context of American politics is indisputable. Religion does not only exist as a personal living conviction and faith, but also as a component of political culture. It has always been part and major force in shaping the nation's culture, character and politics. No matter what the Constitution says, it is much more than an element of public life.

When Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous French political historian and thinker, first arrived in the United States in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, he observed that, "The religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention... it directs the customs of the community, and by regulating domestic life, it regulates the state" (qtd. in Roche 1). Visitors might say the same today. Tocqueville followed his impression of American religiosity, "The longer I stayed in the country, the more conscious I became of the important political consequences resulting from this novel situation" (qtd. in Roche 1). In the same vein, the well-known social scientist Max Weber who traveled to the United States in 1904 became particularly fascinated during his visit with the role of religion in American life which pushed him to write the most famous book in all of sociology, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* and a profound essay titled "The Protestant Sects and the Spirit of Capitalism" (qtd. in Gerteis).

God imbues the whole of the American society of today and is a part of the set of values that Americans live by; the Americans sanctified the role of religion since the time when the first settlers had arrived in the country. The American people believe that it is

their mission to struggle for global peace and freedom and to help those who suffer and it is their duty to spread the American values throughout the world.

Early settlers were Christian Protestants who had left England to be able to practice their religion freely. There were different branches of Christianity at that time and one of them is Puritanism. What is truly fascinating with these people is how they looked upon themselves. They thought that the American people are the chosen people and the direct hands of God (Lambert), this idea had penetrated their society and can be seen everywhere.

Regardless of the constitutional firewall between church and state, religion has an influence on US politics to a degree not seen in other developed countries. National leaders are forever asking God to bless America and its presidents hardly ever give a major speech without invoking religion, extolling religious principles, sending their prayers to casualties of disasters. This advocacy of faith is not heard in Europe but that may be for the reason that the majority is no longer religious and because voting members are not devout (Barber).

The wall of separation between church and state has many holes. Religion is apparent throughout the whole country, prayers start on each day's work in Congress, almost all US presidents typically end their national speeches by asking God to bless America, US money includes the expression "In God We Trust," in the 1950s the pledge to the flag was amended to contain the phrase "One nation, under God," also Moses is visible in the Supreme Court's friezes. Nearly all the Americans support these public acknowledgements of the dominant Judeo-Christian culture (Jelen and Wilcox, "Religion and Politics..." 447).

Whether it is appropriate or not, US leaders and voters alike consider many legislative issues with a religious edge. This is often done under the excuse of the protection of religious freedom, as the justices ruled recently in the Supreme Court case of Hobby Lobby<sup>1</sup> that the coverage of some contraceptive measures violated religious liberties. A lot of controversial and hot topics in American politics, such as same-sex marriage, abortion, birth control, and

stem cell research have been made so by the religious involvement they lead to (Mitchell, “What Role does Religion Play?”). That is why the non-religious people are underrepresented in US legislature.

In recent years, the court has also handed down a sequence of decisions and rulings which limited the free exercise of religious minorities, including the rights of orthodox Jews to put on religious headgear under soldiers helmets and the Native Americans’ longstanding practice of using peyote<sup>2</sup> in their religious ceremonies. In response, some religious groups formed a broad coalition that lobbied Congress to pass the Religious Freedom Restoration Act, yet the court later canceled major portions of this act (Jelen and Wilcox, “Religion and Politics...” 449).

Religious groups are very active in American politics, even though the US is known for its constitutional provisions separating church and state. As an example, in 1988, two ordained ministers sought after the presidency, others have served in state legislatures, on Congress, and in city councils representing both parties. White Evangelical churches, during the past decade, have distributed implicitly guides for voters in order to endorse Republican candidates prepared by the Christian Coalition, at the same time as African American churches also offered their basements to campaign activities, and even have registered voters on church property and called the candidates of Democratic party to address the congregation (Jelen and Wilcox, “Religion and Politics...” 434). The Catholic Church additionally has lobbied Congress about issues concerning health care and abortion while Conservative Protestants sought to influence the curricula of public schools and to prohibit abortions while Liberal Protestant denominations lobbied work in order to expand racial justice and increase the minimum wage (434).

Religion therefore is embroiled in American political process and that magnifies the clear significance of religion in people’s everyday lives. According to Wits, “US



Conservatives went to war in Afghanistan to separate religion from politics abroad while striving to unite religion and politics at home” (qtd. in Barber). It is confirmed in US politicians’ words, such as Andrew Johnson, Vice President of Abraham Lincoln who says:

I do believe in Almighty God! And I believe also in the bible...Let us look forward to the time when can we take the flag of our country and nail it below the cross, and there let it wave as it waved in the olden times, and let us gather around it and inscribed for our motto: “Liberty and Union, one and inseparable, now and forever,” and exclaim, Christ first, our country next.  
(Savage 247)

### **1.2.1 The Significance of Presidents’ Religious Affiliations**

Although the US Constitution explicitly forbids any religious test or obligation to hold public office, a large number of US presidents have overtly showed their religious leanings off. Every single US presidential candidate is known to speak the language of the faithful which makes a positive impact on their lives (Barnett).

The Constitution in Article VI indicates that “no religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.” This declaration aims to stop the intervention of government in religious coercion and clearly specifies the intentions of the Constitution’s authors to make sure that all Americans are welcome and eligible to engage in political spectrum whether or not they share the religious values of the mainstream (Montgomery).

Any kind of declaration that ignores peoples’ qualifications and background and considers them ineligible for particular political office because of their religious beliefs, obviously contradicts with the spirit and the text of the Constitution, as well as with the American fundamental values of equal treatment and equal opportunity under the law(Montgomery). No American should be excluded or banned from involvement in the

political arena simply on account of their religious views

As Republican President Teddy Roosevelt observed in the center of anti-Catholic panic:

The Constitution explicitly forbids the requiring of any religious test as a qualification for holding office. To impose such a test by popular vote is as bad as to impose it by law. To vote either for or against a man because of his creed is to impose upon him a religious test and is a clear violation of the spirit of the Constitution. (qtd. in Fulford)

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, however, some States kept religious tests such as the law passed by the State of Maryland which obliged a person holding any office of profit or trust to declare a belief in God, though Maryland's requirement seems evidently an unconstitutional religious test (Lasson), until 1961 relying on the First and the Fourteen Amendments, a unanimous Supreme Court overruled the law, many political and religious leaders have decried the Supreme Court decision. Religious right activists Tony Perkins and Harry Jackson called the Supreme Court's ruling an assault against the Christian faith (*Personal Faith, Public Policy*).

Some public officials and religious leaders have declared a *de facto* religious test for public office, claiming that Christian Americans should vote for Christian politicians. For instance, Evangelical activists have proposed that it would be improper for a Christian to vote for a Mormon presidential candidate, because the latter once holding office might lead people to adopt his faith (Montgomery). It is strange how the religious affiliations of presidents may affect their electability in a country emphasized on the separation of church and state; US presidents' religious commitments shape their visions of society and their stances on policy matters and also how they want to lead it. Nearly all US presidents have been formal members of a particular religious body or church, and every president since James A.

Garfield can be assigned to a specific affiliation (Masci).

Presidents' religious convictions have powerfully influenced their understandings of the meaning of life, the dignity of humans, the role of government, the nature and purpose of society, and the basis of morality. "If a man's faith is sincere, it is the most important thing about him," argued presidential biographer Stephen Mansfield; "it is impossible to understand who he is and how he will lead without first understanding the religious vision that informs his life." He added "A person's faith commitment is a key window" into his "system of values and beliefs," (G. Smith 3). *Washington Post* columnist Nathan Diament avows, "A president's religion matters because it often affects his policy choices."(3)

When considering the vital role of the presidents' religious affiliations, one lasting question concerns the kind of individual who is supposed to be elected president. Although John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama have challenged biases against candidates from religious minorities, still candidates from those minorities especially Muslims and atheists have little chance to run for office. Brett Benson et al observe that "for most of American history, the majority of eligible citizens were eliminated from being considered for the presidency. If a qualified individual happened to be African-American, female, Catholic, or Jewish (to name just a few), they had little chance at winning the White House" (Benson 607) and there is a little hope to believe that this state of affairs will change in the near future.

American candidates obviously make a big deal of their religious affiliations. Each and every US vice president and president was raised in a family affiliated with Christian religion, except for the former presidents Herbert Hoover and Richard Nixon who were raised as Quakers. Even though Roman Catholicism has been the chief religious denomination in the United States, the list of Catholic American Presidents includes only one member, John F. Kennedy and only one vice-president Joe Biden (Cooper). After the assassination of Kennedy in 1963, the only Catholic presidential nominee was John Kerry, who was riding an important

party ticket (Barnett). Sanders is the only candidate who has represented himself as not specifically religious (Schulson). Yet there has never been a Jewish president or vice president and all the rest were raised in families with Protestant Christianity affiliations.

The religious beliefs of American presidents never have been overlooked, regardless whether it is seen as a negative or positive attribute. For example, in the case of George W. Bush, religion is worn as a proud demarcation of his personal moral standing and virtuous character (“Religion and its Effects on Political Party Affiliation”). However, in the case of John F. Kennedy it is a flaw to be overcome, Controversy swirling around Kennedy’s religion forced him to confront the issue head-on in 1960 speech in Houston, before a crowd of several hundred mostly Protestant ministers:

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish, where no public official either requests or accepts instructions on public policy from the Pope, the National Council of Churches or any other ecclesiastical source, where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials, and where religious liberty is so indivisible that an act against one church is treated as an act against all. (“God in the White House”)

Kennedy knew he had to address the question of his Catholicism. He famously (and for some, especially today, quite controversially) declared, “I believe in an America where the separation of church and state is absolute; where no Catholic prelate would tell the president, should he be Catholic, how to act, and no Protestant minister would tell his parishioners for whom to vote,” (Eidenmuller) and he concluded, “I do not speak for my church on public matters; and the church does not speak for me.” He added, “I believe in a president whose religious views are his own private affair, neither imposed by him upon the nation, nor imposed by the nation upon him as a condition to holding that office” (qtd. in

Grinder and Shaw).

Two iconic American Presidents, however, did not show any kind of official religion. The first is Thomas Jefferson who lost his orthodox Christian faith during his time in office. But he continued to believe a sort of impersonal God as the creator. Jefferson is known for editing the New Testament, in which he left only the teachings of Jesus and deleted any reference to any miracle (Barnett). His campaign that ended state support of religion fueled doubt about his personal religious beliefs. His Federalist opponents vilified him as a libertine and atheist (“God in the White House”). The second non-religious president in the United States is Abraham Lincoln. He was raised in a religious household and spoke often about religion and God, yet never joined any church (Masci). Scholars frequently ask whether or not he was a Christian and some aspects of his faith remain a mystery.

### **1.2.2 Religion in the Context of American Presidential Elections**

The role played by the religious aspect in American electoral context is one of the most important yet ignored factors, particularly among foreign observers. Since the 1980s, divisions in the electorate in light of religious observance have turned out more and more conspicuous in determining vote choice and partisanship (Wilson). Religion plays an important role in American politics, and candidates frequently attempt to demonstrate their religiousness in many ways. Regardless of the association between religion and conservatism, studies show that candidates of both parties regularly use religious language and seek to display personal religiousness (Gaskins and Clifford, “Trust Me...”).

Religious groups are also active in American electoral politics. They recruit candidates, sometimes from within their own ranks, and mobilize volunteers and money behind those candidates in intra-party disputes. These groups are particularly active in internal party politics, working to manipulate party’s nominations, platforms, and policies (Wilcox and Robinson). African-American churches are also quite active in internal

Democratic politics, and are major power bases for a number of candidates, many of whom have historically been spiritual leaders. Religious groups also supply financial resources for candidates, generally through networks of individual donors. Certainly, even small religious groups such as Buddhists and Jews can provide considerable financial support to candidates when they give in unison (Jelen and Wilcox, "Religion and Politics..." 463).

Religion could have a fairly serious effect on certain groups of voters, a fact supported by various researches. It explains why so many politicians are comfortable and even purposeful in sharing their religious affiliations and beliefs. Since religion is plays a vital role in the lives of the majority of US citizens and deeply rooted in their society throughout history, it is important for the political candidates to include religious beliefs and principles in political campaigns in order to make it possible for them to sell their messages.

Since religion is one of the most important factors in determining the voting behavior in America, it is important to speak the language of the faithful, for a politician seeking to appeal to religiously inclined voters, as religious rhetoric serves as a dog whistle (Gaskins and Clifford, "America is Becoming more Secular...") for conservative politicians seeking to appeal to religious voters. Politicians in the United States are generally attuned to the citizenry; especially if they seek to reach a particular attractive voting bloc, they appeal to it through actions or simply, with words by invoking religion as they craft public messages, which is a straightforward way for politicians to show direct support for believers and religious groups (Coe). Because even subtle religious signs transmitted during a political campaign may shape voter's attitudes about candidates.

Numerous American politicians openly use Christian expressions, and a vast majority utilizes the tropes of America's civil religion, such as "God bless America." Democrats who would like to run for public office have found it helpful, in the past few election cycles, to be religious. The Democratic Party has made a point of employing candidates who are culturally

moderate to conservative and more ready to speak religiously, this is why more prominent Democrats are using Christian language and overtly religious rhetoric than at any time in recent memory (Stiltner and Michels 260).

Many Americans are distinctly against this. In the past few years, there appeared countless of books which were highly critical of religion and were best-sellers in the USA. Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and Richard Dawkins, American authors, philosophers, and neuroscientists, argue that religious belief has no intellectual credibility (Biggar, Nigel, and Hogan), and that religion, according to Hitchens, “poisons everything” (Hitchens). Other Americans seek to increase the presence of religion in politics and still expect politicians to be religious people, even though some partisan pastors were a source of embarrassment for candidates running for office in 2008 (Stiltner and Michels 261).

In fact, there are two ways in which candidates can make direct appeals to religious voters in American presidential elections. First, the candidate may explicitly refer to his own religious identity. For instance, he or she can openly discuss the importance of religion, or can effectively label himself as “a Christian” or “born again” (Bradberry). In this way, the candidate is signaling to particular religious group such as born again Christians or highly religious voters that “I understand you” or “I am one of you” (qtd. in Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon* 8).

It is almost predictable and widespread, for candidates for office in the United States to announce their religious beliefs and to make use of extensive religious topics in support of their political agendas. During the time of campaigns, candidates should withstand the scrutiny of religious groups and church leaders with moral and religious agendas. And they have to face an electorate, on election day, about two-thirds of which declare religion as important factor in their lives (Stiltner and Michels 260). It is not surprising; it is the rare candidate, for the presidency or the Senate who completely avoids religious language.

Alternatively, or in addition to the first way, a candidate attracts religious voters' attention through the discussion of specific political issues that are often crucial for them and that are closely connected to particular religious values. In the few past decades, the two most prominent issues in the context of American politics are same-sex marriage and abortion (Bradberry).

Religion is a strong indicator of an individual's voting behavior. It deeply influences voters on the way they look at specific issues, such as homosexuality, abortion, environment, and economics. The voters then use their responses to these issues as guidelines to help them decide which presidential candidate to vote for. It is consequently logical to recognize that religion has a considerable influence on an individual's voting behavior in presidential elections (Gibbs). In short, these methods used by candidates are two of the most important ways to appeal to religious voters.

Scholars have conducted survey experiments to study the use of coded and implicit language used by politicians to appeal to one constituency, such as evangelicals, without alienating other moderates. When a particular candidate makes appeals based on religion while other candidates do not, or when that particular candidate appeals more frequently compared to other candidates, then the degree of religiosity or identification with a specific religious group is statistically a significant predictor of voting for that candidate (Bradberry).

Religious observance has become the strongest determinant of vote choice among Americans. By 2008, the political gap between religious and secular Americans came to dwarf more widely recognized divisions. According to National Election Studies, Americans who never or rarely attend churches (42% of all whites) voted 58% for the Democrat Barack Obama. Whereas, Americans who attend religious services once a week or more (33% of all whites) gave the Republican John McCain 73% of their votes. This partisan disparity based on religion in the United States is larger than that between rich and poor, men and women,



and exceeded the gap between white and black Americans (Wilson).

Current US political realities create incentives for politicians to think carefully about when and how they should talk about their faith and how doing so could be politically advantageous. For example, In 2010, the prayer Caucus in Congress wrote an open letter to president Barack Obama, in which they criticized him for not mentioning God often enough in his speeches (Coe).

In spite of the increasingly secular nature of US society, American politicians have always had a close relationship with religion. It is almost extraordinary that a politician would explicitly identify themselves as an atheist; as Americans perceive atheists as less moral and trustworthy. When American politicians remind people that they are devout, they are playing on Americans' bias towards favoring the religious. Politicians of both major political parties have always used personal religious language, narratives, and religious imagery as making appeal to religious voters. It is almost unheard of for an American politician who identifies himself as an atheist (Gaskins and Clifford, "America is Becoming more Secular..."). A Pew Forum poll found that 63% of Americans would be less likely, to vote for a, candidate who does not believe in God (Stiltner and Michels 261).

Atheists are the most disliked social group in the United States, recent research in psychology reveals that prejudice towards them is rooted in perceptions of atheists' fundamental immorality and untrustworthiness. Economic studies also demonstrate that people trust their money to religious individuals, because they usually associate religion with trustworthiness, but researches propose that these biases are widespread even among people who are not very religious themselves (Gaskins and Clifford, " America is Becoming more Secular..."). Belief that atheists cannot be moral is a strong predictor of unwillingness to vote for an atheist, indicating the powerful link between perceptions of moral character and vote choice. Consequently, American politicians took advantage of religion, not only to convey

their ideological stance, but also to emphasize their religiousness in order to enhance perceptions of their trustworthiness and morality.

It is pervasive in American politics that someone who is atheist cannot be elected president. Most Americans have always thought that it is essential to them that presidents have strong religious beliefs. A Pew Research Center study finds that being an atheist is one of the biggest liabilities a presidential candidate can have; half of American adults say they would be less likely to vote for a hypothetical presidential candidate who does not believe in God, while only 6% say they would be more likely to vote for a nonbeliever (Mitchell, "What Role does Religion Play?"). Evangelicals proved the most prejudiced towards atheists, whereas almost all religious denominations, with the exception of Jews, were less willing to vote for an atheist candidate (Gaskins and Clifford, "America is Becoming more Secular...").

One of the main headlines seen when former President Barack Obama sworn in had to do with how he began his day: "With Visit to Episcopal Church," this was principally a big deal for a number of Americans who believed either through prejudice or through misinformation that he is a Muslim, and his professed religious beliefs were fake. This kind of prejudice reveals just how much stock certain subsets of voters put in religious identification. Not all voters are driven by this sort of prejudice, of course. Some simply prefer a spiritually guided leader (Mitchell, "Why does Religion Matter in Politics?").

The use of religion in political campaigns, however, is inappropriate and even unsettling in a religiously diverse society such as America. Appealing to votes through religious lines is divisive; votes are supposed to make their decisions upon their assessment of candidates' integrity, political positions, and qualifications, in order to go with the American ideal of including all Americans in the political process, no matter if they are members of religious minorities, powerful religious group, or subscribe to no faith. The religious beliefs of candidates should never be used by voters as public test for office, or

suggested in political campaigns by political candidates as shorthand summary of their qualifications (“Religion in Political Campaigns”). Candidates who legitimately aspire to public office should set the proper tone for elections and be prepared to be a leader for all the Americans, believers and nonbelievers.

US politicians, especially presidents, use religion to further their own purposes; to enhance their popularity, to gain approval of various groups, win elections, fortify their claim to be honest and virtuous, and increase support for their policies. They employ moral and religious language to defend their actions, programs, and policies and to criticize those of their opponents (G. Smith). Religious rhetoric has always been a part of American politics, the US presidents undoubtedly turned to the nation’s history, rhetorical and semantic devices, and relied on religious morals of the American citizens while speaking to the public (O’Connell). It is also true that they have been doing so ever since the presidency first was formed.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>The Supreme Court granted a landmark victory for religious liberty, ruling that individuals do not lose their religious freedom when they open family business. The court ruled 5-4 in favor of David and Barbara Green and their family business, Hobby Lobby ruling points out that they do not have to violate their faith or pay severe fines, because requiring family-owned corporations to pay for insurance coverage for contraception under the Affordable Care Act violated a federal law protecting religious freedom (Liptak).

<sup>2</sup>A hallucinogenic drug made from cactus plants (“Peyote”).

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## **Chapter Two**

### **When US Presidents Politicize Religious Rhetoric**

After having explained, in the previous chapter, the role religion plays in US politics and the intense power it possesses and influence it can exert over individuals, particularly presidents, the present chapter strives to achieve multiple objectives. It attempts to examine how and why US presidents have been using the religious rhetoric during their presidency, with the intention of recognizing the rhetorical devices that the speechwriters and politicians use in their inaugural addresses. Paying particular attention to the way political elites use religious language in the public sphere determines the exact role religion plays in American politics and representative dynamics of the country.

Religion has always been woven into the fabric of American politics, because no barrier has existed between religion and politics, the First Amendment to US Constitution erected a high wall only between the two institutions: the church and the state. The majority of US gifted presidents have been extremely religious people who regularly refer to their faith and ask their fellow citizens to call on their religion in times of trouble. Various electoral coalitions have also been built and sustained on the power of religious principles.

#### **2.1 Presidential Rhetoric: Definitions, Kinds, and Functions**

As deliberate use of language intended to convey a message to a specific audience, rhetoric is an essential tool used by political leaders to garner support. Politicians need constituent support in order to win elections and accomplish efficient policies while in office (Skulski). Religion in the context of American presidency is much more evident in political leaders' discourses and public communications. To understand the undeniable relationship between religion and rhetoric, it is vital to include some definitions to rhetoric since it is the focus of this chapter.

Rhetoric is the art of communication that equips the US President to inform, influence,

and motivate citizens in a specific situation. Corbett defines rhetoric, “the art of discourse, an art that aims to improve the capability of writers or speakers to inform, persuade, or motivate particular audiences in specific situations” (qtd. in “Rhetorical Communication”). While listening to presidential rhetoric, the potential for audience impact is great because every audience at any time is capable of being influenced by a speech. For instance, the president in his inaugural address may persuade citizens who previously opposed him during elections; presidential rhetoric particularly religious language also has the potential to motivate citizens towards hope of a greater future and unifying the nation under the president’s leadership.

Great thinkers across the ages debated over the nature and purposes of rhetoric. Many have considered rhetoric to be mere persuasion; others see rhetoric as only ornamentation within discourse that obscures truth. They offered different definitions of rhetoric. Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the discovery of the available means of persuasion” (qtd. in Barrett 1). Plato understood rhetoric as the “art of enchanting the soul with words” (qtd. in Eidenmuller). Francis Bacon describes rhetoric as “the application of reason to imagination for the better moving of the will.” Kenneth Burke, the American literacy theorist has explained rhetoric as “the use of symbols to induce cooperation in men” (qtd. in “Rhetoric”).

The philosopher of law, Chaim Perelman has argued that the purpose of rhetoric is “to intensify an adherence to values, to create a disposition to act, and finally to bring people to act” (qtd. in Adee 10). Then, Rhetoric is the calculated use of communication to attain specific aims. Rhetoric is necessary to the understanding of how people come to believe, know, and act. Rhetoric is the dynamic process by which citizens transmit, discover, and interpret symbols, information, and ideas. There are six main elements in this rhetorical process: (1) speaker or rhetor, (2) his or her world-view, (3) message, (4) audience, (5) exigence, and (6) context or situation (Adee 10).

Since communication is a necessary element of the political sphere, politics and

rhetoric have a strong and an unbreakable bond. Rhetoric and religion also have a relationship; as Kenneth Burke explains, “the subject religion falls under the head of rhetoric in the sense that rhetoric is the art of persuasion...and in order to plead for such as persuasively as possible, the religious always ground their exhortations in statements of the widest and deepest possible scope, concerning the authorship of men’s motives” (qtd. in Clark 126). Consequently, if politics is about power, power is realized throughout the persuasion of the other, rhetoric is the talent of persuasion, and religion is a means of persuasion, then elements all are fundamentally tangled with the expressions of the country’s leaders (Roche 5).

The language used by the presidents in articulating the religion varies according to occasion. There are at least three kinds of presidential religious rhetoric. The first when a president uses religious language in special occasions or ceremonies. For instance, funeral eulogies and holiday addresses, here the president is speaking in religious terms because it suits the occasion. The second type is when the president wants to direct the country through difficult circumstances; a crisis is shown to be essential condition for a president to engage in religious speech, natural disaster, riot, or a terrorist attack (O’Connell).

As the leaders of the world’s wealthiest, most ethnically and racially diverse and most powerful nation, American presidents face immense pressure and have daunting responsibilities. Even though the challenges facing the United States considerably increased after World War I, earlier presidents also confronted internal dissension and threats posed by foreign powers. President’s religion can greatly help him in carrying out his duties and playing the role of the pastor in chief during calamities and crisis (Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*). Every single US president has helped his citizens to deal with painful incidents and untimely deaths, and several have sent American troops into battle. When doing so, they have typically depended on their faith and used religious rhetoric to provide hope, unify

Americans, support their actions, and assuage people's grief. Holmes discusses Washington's individual religious beliefs, emphasizing that Washington's diary indicates, "He worshiped more frequently during national crises and periods of resistance" (qtd. in Roche). The final kind is the use of instrumental religious rhetoric by the president in order to convince parties to support a goal of his, such as passing a piece of legislation (O'Connell).

Presidents also adopt religious rhetoric only when their objectives are in unanticipated threat, the existence of crisis proved to be sufficient to oblige many presidents to overcome their reluctance to employ religious rhetorical themes. In a number of cases, including the campaign of Jimmy Carter for energy legislation and Bill Clinton's demands to retire the Lewinsky<sup>1</sup> shame, religious language marks a difference in president's approach, presidents usually relied on this language when their positions have badly deteriorated and other arguments have been used are unsuccessful (O'Connell).

A different kind of religious rhetoric is presidential coded communication, which is the implicit use of language that has special meaning for a subset of the population and might have meaning that is only heard by some. This sort of communication is not a recent phenomenon in US politics and has recently acquired the label of "dog-whistle politics" (Albertson, "Dog-Whistle Politics"). References to biblical verses, prayers, and hymns will resonate more with those who share a religious tradition, but this religious meaning will be unnoticeable to those who do not.

Religious rhetoric used by US presidents performs many key functions in the American political life, from providing voters with the essential information to form preferences about candidates and issues to setting the tone of political debate, the language of political discourse provides important link between the mass public and political elites, it is how leaders convince and provide opinion leadership, and how citizens communicate preferences since, "every audience at any moment is capable of being changed by a speech,"

(Bitzer 3) and ultimately defines the contours of democratic governance, particularly in a representative democracy (Chapp).

Like other politicians, American presidents use religion in their discourses as a political weapon to achieve their goals; to gain popularity and support of various groups, win elections, increase support for their political plans, and to strengthen the credibility and morality of their claims. The moral and religious rhetoric are used as a tool to fight the opposing parts as well as to defend their own policies and programs beyond the range of usual perception, passing them to the spiritual words, practical interests and strengthen citizen's commitment to them. Moreover, presidents use moral and biblical discourse because Americans, who are much more religious than citizens of other postindustrial nations, expect it (Smith, *Faith and the Presidency*).

A president's openness to his faith and the use of religious and biblical references enables millions to identify on a very basic level with the most successful leader in the world. Using religious rhetoric also enables the presidents to rally citizens' support for different reasons, for instance, defend complicated legislation and complex policies, fulfill their promises to provide honorable management, or seize the initiative from Congress on key issues. The use of moral and religious arguments helps reinforce the president's authority and allows him to claim the moral high ground (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*).

## **2.2 Religious Rhetoric in the American Presidency**

Despite the supposed separation of Church and State, religious rhetoric entered the American presidency since 1789, when the first US president, George Washington, in his Inaugural Address declares that "it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the universe" ("Great Inaugural Addresses"). Since that time presidents have used religious references and rhetoric from casual event to campaigning events to State of the Union Addresses. The purpose of



this chapter at this level is to explore the rhetorical functions of references to God and the Bible used by US presidents.

George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, and Thomas Jefferson are known as the titans of American political history; each one is identified among the nation's most successful and skilled leaders. All of them used spiritual language as it served their desires. The stability of religious rhetoric and its importance of it in presidential governance, when combined with its inherently controversial nature, make it absolutely imperative that we completely appreciate the role it plays in US politics (O'Connell 10).

Although Thomas Jefferson was bitterly accused of atheism, he regularly refers to God in his presidential addresses, calling him "Supreme Being," "Almighty," and "Intelligent and Powerful Agent" (O'Connell 9). Even when he was advocating for a high wall of separation between church and state, he used religious rhetoric. In Virginia, Jefferson was known by his reference to one Biblical verse (Federer), specifically, Matthew 16:18: "And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it" ("Matthew 16:18"). To those that predicted religion would fail without state support, Jefferson replied that Christ had already precluded that possibility.

It is somehow astonishing that religious rhetoric occupies a central place in a country premised on separation of church and state. However, several US presidents have exhibited profound and meaningful faith that has shaped their worldviews and characters and have testified that their religious beliefs affected their performance in office, analysis of issues, political philosophy, and decision-making (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*).

Other presidents who are considered among the most religious are John Adams, William McKinley, and Woodrow Wilson; all of them were keen believers who read the Bible, prayed, and attended church regularly. John Adams who was vice president of the Bible Society worshiped at three different churches and would attend service even in heavy

snow. He also cited religious references from the book of Genesis, during a debate over the Oregon territory in 1846 (Wickman).

The post-World War II US presidents enacted the rhetorical contract in a variety of ways. While every president does mention the position of religion whether extensively or in passing, he typically talks about it in a specific context. That is, religious associations and the faith they adopt are presented as way for the individual to gather meaning and seek assistance in discussing the existing matters of the day. While several presidents do make suggestion to how organized government and religion may work together to attempt to remedy social troubles, they do not suggest a formulaic plan of actively and evidently mingling the two in partnership (Curry).

American people expect the presidents to proclaim national days of prayer, celebrate the religious holidays of different religious groups, lead people in mourning the death of statesmen, address national prayer breakfasts, sympathize with grieving families and send consolations, and speak at some major religious gatherings (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*). For the reason that the majority of Americans find religious rhetoric to be moving, comforting, and soothing, they welcome presidents' evoking godly help, calling for prayer, and giving gratitude to God as they deal with war, natural catastrophes, terrorist attacks, and other tragedies.

In the past several decades, presidents have highlighted the moral and religious dimensions of their leadership through expanded media outlets. Today, US politicians are habitually asked about their religious affiliations and expected to make their own faith visible. Politicians can therefore meet the expectations and may improve citizens' perceptions of them by shining their speeches with religious references (Wickman). To illustrate, in an obvious attempt to advertise his religiosity, Jimmy Carter during 1976 campaign identified himself as a "born-again Christian," an active member of the Southern Baptist Convention,

and a Sunday school teacher and declares that, “there is no way to understand me and my political philosophy without understanding my faith” (Berardi 35). He led millions of evangelical Christians to vote for him. He took the oath of office in 1977 with not one but two Bibles, which brought extensive media attention to his candidacy and makes religion one of the primary topics of the campaign (Adee 33).

Presidents may also employ religious rhetoric as a political strategy that aims to achieve specific objectives such as, attracting voters’ attention during presidential campaigns. Dan F. Hahn, Professor of political communication has argued that Carter’s faith became part of his campaign strategy, “during the campaign ‘1976’ Carter’s religion was used to suggest to the people that Carter’s godliness could help him be a good president, that because of the God-Carter relationship the Carter-people relationship would be close” (qtd. in Adee 35), Carter as well declares, “I can be a better President because of my faith” (qtd. in Hendrickson and Douglas 5).

Presidents’ religious convictions strongly influenced John Adams’s efforts to fund canals, roads, and educational institutions and endorse diplomacy, William McKinley’s decision to declare war against Spain and take control of Philippines, Herbert Hoover’s quests to defend civil liberties and reform prisons, Harry Truman’s approach to the Cold War and the recognition of Israel, Bill Clinton’s support of religious liberty, Barack Obama’s plans on gay civil rights and poverty, in addition to the crusades of many presidents to proceed world peace. Several US presidents have affirmed that their belief in God grew stronger during their years in office and they insisted that their faith gave them equanimity and courage in the midst of the storms that swirled around them and help them cope with immense challenges (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*).

The religious references used by US politicians would call forth particular associative feelings to believers of perhaps, hope, trust, and faith. Each word in presidential public

address is cautiously calculated; no term, phrase, and pause is coincidence or chance. Scholars like Anthony W. Crowell have studied numerous drafts of presidential communications acknowledging the attention to details, “If each individual word and reference is carefully chosen for a reason, then references to Christ and God are highly planned” (qtd. in Roche).

Many Americans consider God as political actor. American political life mixes political rhetoric and religious language with fervor, at the same time with keeping the church and state institutions separate. President’s words evoke emotions in his audience, through the use of biblical imagery and God metaphor which could potentially have an impact of the perceived charisma of the president as well. American politicians have always talked about religion. Even as the public’s engagement with traditional religion was declining, the religious language in American politics truly escalated in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century (“Poll”). With the emergence of new religiously motivated voting blocs, politicians in the United States adjusted their actions and rhetoric accordingly (Coe). Religious political talk became more assertive and remains prominent to the present day, as Hinckley Barbara states:

American presidents engage in moral and explicitly religious activity. Literally they preach, reminding the American people of religious and moral principles and urging them to conduct themselves in accord with these principles. They lead prayers, quote from the Bible, and make theological statements about the Deity and His desires for the nation. . . . They are the moral leaders and high priests of American society...Presidents themselves are contributing to the impression and indeed consciously cultivating it. (73)

The benefit of looking into presidential rhetoric is to understand the relationship between God and politics, what Domke and Coe call “The God Strategy.” This strategy is defined through their assertion that American politicians have taken advantage of rhetorical

use of God “through calculated, deliberate, and partisan use of faith” (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon* 7). The authors propose that the manipulation of faith has been employed by political leaders to appeal purposely to Christian conservatives and to connect with inclined religious voters (Ross et al.). President’s use of God and religious related metaphor and imagery makes his perception stronger among not only those who identify themselves as Christians, but also those who identify themselves with belief in a form of Deity, and also to those who believe that the United States was established and built upon God (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon*).

Bill Clinton in his acceptance speech invoked God many times, quoted scripture, and talked about the importance of religious faith, “I always felt that protecting religious liberty and making the White House accessible to all religious faiths was an important part of my job” (qtd. in “Transcript of Speech by Clinton...”). In 1992 Bill Clinton’s Democratic Convention speech, he quoted scripture openly twice. One example is “as the Scripture says, ‘our eyes have not yet seen, nor our ears heard, nor minds imagined’ what we can build.” This message might have been coded simply by omitting the language “as the Scripture says” (Albertson, “Dog-Whistle Politics”).

An ability to talk the language of religious believers can be particularly influential for a president, who is often in the spotlight and is the American politician most commonly called upon to be America’s “high priest” in times of national ceremonies, disasters, or tragedy. Religious conservatives in particular pay attention to whether a president communicates in ways that connect with them or not. Doug Wead who headed the 1988 presidential campaign of George H. W. Bush advises political leaders to speak the language of religious believers because it can be powerful especially for presidents (Kristof). In 2004, he said to the Frontline news program: “is one means of making a nod to a key segment of the

public, a way, to signal respect to the evangelical community, to say, ‘We don’t exclude you. If I’m president, I will love and respect you as much as any other American. I’m not going to judge, or deny you, just because of your religion.’ Evangelicals feel that.”(qtd. in “Interview Doug Wead”). That is exactly what he did during the campaign by trying to outreach to evangelicals and to show sympathy for their points of view.

George W. Bush helped his father during his presidential campaigns in 1988 and 1992; he centered his attention to Christian conservatives through learning their language, their concerns, and how to turn both into political advantage (Kristof). The Vice President for governmental affairs for the National Association of Evangelicals, Richard Cizik, comments on the extensive use of religious references common in George W. Bush’s public communications:

The president ... used terminology designed, I think, to indicate [to] the evangelicals that ‘Hey, I’m one of you,’ so to speak... It accomplished his purposes. He sent a message, I think, to evangelicals, ‘Hey, I understand.’”<sup>21</sup>  
 To put it simply and pragmatically, a president who can speak the language of religious believers can go a long way toward suggesting that he understands their concerns and deserves their political support. (qtd. in “President and his Faith...”)

Researches in communication and political science reveal that citizens pay careful attention to the language and terms that circulate in political and media discussions. For instance, when religious subjects are always made salient by new media and politicians, citizens become more likely to view religious matters as crucial and to rely on specific conditions central to these matters when evaluating politicians (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: The Rise of Religious Politics in America*).

The amount of religious rhetoric in the presidency increased pointedly when Reagan

took office in 1981 and has remained high ever since (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: The Rise of Religious Politics in America* 76). Ronald Reagan did not shy away from showing his religious beliefs and encouraging Christianity as president. Early in his presidency, he wrote a letter saying: “My daily prayer is that God will help me to use this position so as to serve Him. Teddy Roosevelt once called the presidency a bully pulpit. I intend to use it to the best of my ability to serve the Lord” (qtd. in Skinner et al. 654).

In his first act as president, Ronald Reagan declared the future inaugurations should be affirmed a “day of prayer.” In the evening of 17 July 1980, he delivered his acceptance speech for the presidential nomination of the Republican Party. It was impressive political theater; it was an event when partisan politics and religion were brought together through mass media as never before (Schlesinger). “I’ve been a little afraid to suggest what I’m going to suggest.” A long pause ensued, followed by this: “I’m more afraid not to. Can we begin our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer?” The whole hall went silent, and heads bowed. Reagan then concluded with “God bless America” (“Ronald Reagan: Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination ...”). It was an event where a new religious politics was born (Schlesinger).

### **2.3 Religious Rhetoric in Inaugural Addresses**

The name of God arises in US first inaugural addresses, in a variety of terms. The name God appeared relatively constantly from Roosevelt’s address of 1933 who used it twice to Ronald Reagan who used it most often in his 1981 address, five times. However, Jimmy Carter chose to incorporate varying terms for God, through the use of the word “Lord” instead (Roche), which suggests a more personal and close relationship with God, The use of the word “Lord” proposes a more personal connection with God because in the context of the Old Testament, the use of the term “Lord” is a translation of the Hebrew name “Adonai,” meaning master (“Adonai-Lord-the Name of God”).

The use of different terms does not signify a difference in the relationship between God and the US presidents throughout the inaugural speech, but rather it suggests a different relationship between Carter and God, compared to his preceding and succeeding presidents. Moreover, Presidents Harry Truman, Dwight D. Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy, and Bill Clinton employed the term “the Almighty” besides God’s name; George W. Bush included the term “Lord” and “Father” in reference to God, and his inaugural speech attributes the same term used by George Washington in his own inaugural address to reference God, “Great Author” (Black).

Any US president speaks, whatever the current issues are in the United States; it is constantly in a time of potential inspiration, persuasion, and motivation. In the time of inauguration, the president has the chance to begin his term by persuading the citizens to support his leadership, inspiring the nation, and encouraging them toward a particular hope for the next four years. So, it is a critical rhetorical moment since presidential rhetoric in this case serves to set the stage for the next four years, and the national support is needed (Roche).

Carter implicitly characterized God as a “companion” God in his presidential inaugural address on 20 January 1977, with Old Testament Biblical quotation from the ancient prophet Micah<sup>2</sup>: “He has shown thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8). During his presidency, Carter continued to teach Sunday school and attended church wherever he went, even while on the road. He prayed and read the Bible daily, and when he was not reading it, he reads theologians like Reinhold Niebuhr. He also carried his Christian mission on annual trips for humanity, and when he received the 2002 Nobel Peace Prize, he referred to Jesus Christ as “The Prince of Peace.” His Secret Service codename was “The Deacon ” (Wickman).<sup>3</sup>

American presidents recognize and acknowledge God in their inaugural addresses since



Ronald Reagan's 1981 inaugural speech, which ended with "God bless you, and thank you," then the inaugural speech clincher was forever changed and the expression of "God bless America" is still in effect today with only slight variation (Hafiz). Before Ronald Reagan, the inaugural speeches finished with a hopeful closing thought relating to prosperity or the American dream. Because presidents continued to include the sentiment into their own language through a variety of rewording, they acknowledged the power of such a concluding statement and purposely chose to incorporate it into their own addresses (Roche).

In 1969, Richard Nixon joined to this tendency by concentrating to notions of God and religion in the inaugural speech. In 1969, the final words of Nixon's inaugural address, he encouraged the people to seize the opportunity of the future, "firm in our faith, steadfast in our purpose, cautious of dangers, but sustained by our confidence in the will of God" (qtd. in Richard). This simple concluding sentiment describes the will of God as a source of relief from anxieties of the future and encouragement for citizens to seize the opportunities of the future with a steadfast confidence in God and faith (Roche). This encouragement aims to inspire hope in the American citizens, who in turn, would support their president without fear, but with a confidence in God. So, Nixon's mention of God in his inaugural address might foster support for his future decisions made in office.

In his 1981 inaugural speech, Ronald Reagan also included references to God's nature when he referred to God as having "intended for us to be free" (qtd. in "Ronald Reagan: First Inaugural Address..."). This declaration expressing the opinion that the United States, as "a nation under God" is meant for liberty within God's own will. Reagan ends his speech with "Can we doubt that only a Divine Providence placed this land, this island of freedom, here as a refuge for all those people in the world who yearn to breathe freely: Jews and Christians enduring persecution behind the Iron Curtain, the boat people of Southeast Asia, of Cuba and Haiti, the victims of drought and famine in Africa, the freedom fighters of Afghanistan and

our own countrymen held in savage captivity” (“Ronald Reagan: First Inaugural Address...”). His use of God positioned him as wanting for United States prosperity, sovereignty, and security and as a result, could be trusted as a leader because he had the Nation’s best interest at heart.

George Bush incorporated in his 1989 inaugural address elements of God since he juxtaposes human mistakes and flaws with the mercy of God. By stressing human’s weak points, he says “...And tomorrow the work begins. And I do not mistrust the future. I do not fear what is ahead. For our problems are large, but our heart is larger. Our challenges are great, but our will is greater. And if our flaws are endless, God’s love is truly boundless” (“George Bush...”). This claim describes God boundless love as a remedy for the fear of the future and challenges to come.

Barack Obama incorporated claims concerning God’s nature into his inaugural speech in 2009. He encouraged encourages the people to have trust in God’s grace and hope for the future, just like Reagan’s notion of God’s providential will concerning the United States. Obama considered the freedom of the United States as having received a gift of God. He states:

America, in the face of our common dangers, in this winter of our hardship, let us remember these timeless words. With hope and virtue, let us brave once more the icy currents and endure what storms may come. Let it be said by our children's children that when we were tested, we refused to let this journey end; that we did not turn back, nor did we falter. And with eyes fixed on the horizon and God's grace upon us, we carried forth that great gift of freedom and delivered it safely to future generations. (Barack Obama...)

This claim permits for God to be apparent as having favor and blessing for the United States, and also as a giver of good gifts.

Eisenhower in 1953 described the majesty of Inauguration Day: “We are summoned by this honored and historic ceremony to witness more than the act of one citizen sweating his oath of service, in the presence of God.” This recognition of God’s presence in this event while also telling its history and majesty aligns the presence of God with American history. This conceptual use of God goes on with the inaugural of John F. Kennedy who started with this notion that “the same solemn oath our forbearers prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago” (“John F. Kennedy Quotations...”) was sworn before the Almighty God in such special occasions. In 1965, Lyndon B. Johnson also took up this notion when he spoke “the oath I have taken before you and before God is not mine alone, but ours together” (“Lyndon Baines Johnson...”).

Richard Nixon, as well in his 1969 inauguration gave mention to God’s presence as he begin to conclude his address, proclaimed to have taken an oath “ today in the presence of God” (“Richard Nixon...”). The succeeding presidents do not fail to acknowledge the sacred nature of the oath itself such as, Ronald Reagan who called it a “solemn and momentous occasion”. However, the acknowledgement of God’s presence in the speech is lost. This eventual nuance of God as a presence in presidents’ inaugural addresses and the taking of the oath, in combination with the earlier discussed trends in the use of God, propose that the use of God in this genre of addresses had changed from support in the power of a specific president himself to supporting the objectives and purposes of the elected president during his presidency.

#### **2.4 Is it a Genuine Expression of Personal Faith or just a Political Strategy?**

Current political communications are cautiously written and prepared, with careful management of all the details from the poignant pauses and smiles to the clothes, backdrops used, and words selected. The American author, Ericson, claims that the inclusion of biblical and God-centered rhetoric is a carefully and strategically executed political act and not

substantially an authentic reflection of religious tenet or reliance on the God they claim to follow (Roche).

Many people, especially journalists and academicians, are sarcastic about US presidents' attendance of churches, relationship with religious groups and leaders, and use of spiritual and biblical language. They consider these dealings mainly as tool of proceeding presidents' political objectives, rather than as real expressions of personal faith or reliance on God. Presidential religious rhetoric is a means they use to achieve ulterior motives, electoral victory, personal glorification, and policy success (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*).

Because of the citizens' anticipations and the important ends that religious language serve, presidents, despite the strength of their scriptural understanding or their religiousness, have frequently exhibited public piety and used religious rhetoric. Religious language resonates with millions of Americans; it provides them with trust, hope, support, and comfort. One can never be sure about the actual faith commitments of any president. Relying on their view of the nature of a president's faith and the influence it has on his policies, some see him as a pious pretender and a holy hypocrite, while others see him as biblically sound, faithful follower of Christ (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*).

Presidents obviously do participate in religious activities and employ biblical and moral language in part because of Americans' expectations and to help achieve political ends, but this does not necessarily show that their faith is insincere. Furthermore, it is habitually complicated to find out the role presidents play in crafting their communications and to what extent these speeches express their true beliefs. Even if all presidents have obtained assistance in writing their addresses and, since the time of President Calvin Coolidge, all have employed expert speech-writers (Roche), it is logical to believe that presidents' discourses frequently express their genuine beliefs on a variety of themes, including their religious convictions and understanding of Scripture.

Chief executives, as noted, use religious rhetoric to serve several political intentions; to sponsor national unity, calm collective grief, endorse specific policies, and impress religious groups. It is extremely difficult to disentangle their private beliefs and convictions from their political uses of religion. Therefore, in evaluating presidents' faith, it is necessary to assess their religious practices over their whole lives, not just their years in the White House or on the campaign trail, and to look at both their private correspondence and their public declarations. Evaluating the testimonies of colleagues, friends, and disinterested observers about presidents' faith also presents insights into their personal beliefs and commitments (Smith, *Religion in the Oval Office*).

In fact, political leaders prefer to use religious terms and engage in religion-based behaviors for various reasons. It is impossible to know what is in person's mind and whether he truly cares about the religious feelings of the citizenry. It is possible to know what a politician says or do, but one would need to be a mind reader to say with certainty that a particular US political leader's words and actions are honest, far from hypocrisy, and not planned in advance (mainly when they are religious in nature and particularly when they occur in the contexts that will be our focus) to achieve political objectives (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon*), as Peggy Noonan affirms, "I can't imagine how a president could do his job without faith. However, it is impossible for us to know their hearts. It's barely possible to know your own. Faith is important, but it's also personal. When we force political figures to tell us their deepest thoughts on it, they'll be tempted to act, to pretend."

This analysis of US presidents' rhetoric has demonstrated that religion had a larger effect on various presidents' political actions, worldviews, policies, and decision-making than is usually recognized. This chapter concludes that it is hard, if not impossible, to distinguish the president's personal religious beliefs from their use of faith to serve partisan political purposes.

## Endnotes

1. Monica Lewinsky is a former White House intern best known for her affair with President Bill Clinton (“Monica Lewinsky”). Web. 4 June 2017

2. Eponymous prophet of the Book of Micah in the Old Testament (“Micah”). Web. 8 June 2017.

3. An ordained minister of an order ranking below that of priest (“Deacon”). Web. 5 June 2017.

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## **Chapter Three**

### **Reflecting the Use of Religious Rhetoric in the Case of George W.**

#### **Bush: Political Hypocrisy or False Piety?**

US history is a permanent witness to the inclusion of religious rhetoric in presidents' political discourses, mainly in times of crises. One obvious example of a president who has mastered the use of religious language is George W. Bush, whose political discourses are usually full of biblical references and religious images. Despite the fact that almost every single American president openly appealed to religion in political speeches, George W. Bush has done so in a manner different from his predecessors (Curry).

A number of reasons clarify the selection of President George W. Bush to become the focus of this chapter. First, he was very open about his faith and often emphasized the role of religion in his administration's beliefs, actions, and policies. Second, he tried deliberately to support religious conservatives and groups, which is evident in his use of religious rhetoric. Third, George W. Bush changed the traditional pattern of religious rhetoric and highly used religious references than any other previous president.

#### **3.1 The Background of a US Manipulating President**

The purpose of this chapter is to study and explore how President George W. Bush used religious language when addressing the American people and the rest of the world. Speeches made by George W. Bush on different occasions constitute the material of this chapter; the majority of them concern the war on Iraq and "War on Terror". What is particular about President George W. Bush's rhetoric during the events that follow the 9/11 attacks is that it has a strong religious element.

##### **3.1.1 Religious Background**

George W. Bush was raised by devout parents and was always a churchgoer. He attended different mainline Protestant churches to Bible study groups, to one-on-one talk with

Rev. Billy Graham, to evangelical mega churches. His father was an Episcopalian, his mother a Presbyterian, and George W. Bush attended churches of both denominations (Goodstein). When he married Laura Bush in 1977, he became a member of the United Methodist Church. In spite of this, George W. Bush's youth was known by violent and bad mood, vulgar language, the frequent use of drugs, heavy drinking, and unsuccessful business efforts, facts that raise a lot of questions about the sincerity of his church membership (Ashbee 48). He certainly avoided as much as possible the personal excesses for which he was known and wanted to show only his religiosity that may benefited him.

After two decades of heavy drinking, George W. Bush decided to change his life which had been confused and diffused starting with joining a Bible study group in 1985. He learned the Scriptures for two years and succeeded in refocusing his life and quit his bad habit of binge drinking (Stam). He re-ordered his life so that it fit conservative evangelicals' mentality, vision, and ideology.

When George W. Bush decided to run for office, he did not discuss polemical themes like other candidates; he rather focused his attention to make a strong link with Christian evangelical sector by the help of the political strategist Karl Rove, who recommended him to only speak about his religious beliefs and convictions (Stam). Thus, George W. Bush introduced himself as "a man with Jesus in his heart" (Stam).

George W. Bush's December 1999 comment during a debate among Republican candidates in Iowa helped propel religion to the forefront of the campaign. When he was asked by a journalist who his favorite philosopher or thinker was, he answered: "Christ, because he changed my heart" (qtd. in Buttry). Whether Bush's statement was politically planned or a spontaneous testimony to his convictions, it "packed a powerful punch among conservative Christians." Speaking for many of them, leading Southern Baptist Richard Land simply responded, "Wow" (Smith).

At a national prayer breakfast in February 2003, he said he “felt the presence of the Almighty” (qtd. in “A Hot Line to Heaven”). Vice President Al Gore as well assumed that George W. Bush was a born-again Christian and that each time before making any political action, he asked himself, “What would Jesus do?” (Albertson). Many commentators believe that George W. Bush’s use of religious rhetoric targeted the evangelical Christian voters in the country.

The president’s chief political strategist, Karl Rove, declared that percentages of evangelical who voted for George W. Bush in the 2000 elections were unsatisfactory. Although he received almost eighty percent of white evangelicals’ vote in that election (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: The Rise of Religious Politics...*), from George W. Bush’s accounting, “There should have been 19 million of them, and instead there were 15 million of them. So, four million of them did not turn out to vote” (qtd. in Mooney). George W. Bush’s willingness to capture the attention of the evangelical Christians is one of the most important reasons behind his use of religious rhetoric, since they represent a central bloc of voters in the United States. Such religious language reinforces evangelicals’ support of the president and helps his re-election in the 2004 race (Black 6).

It is difficult to know what is in the mind of former President George W. Bush, but opponents and supporters alike propose that he appears to be a true believer and that his use of religious language is, at least on some levels, a genuine reflection of his personal religious beliefs (Black) while the two sides disagree on the impact of his faith perspectives on politics. Those who have common faith and common political views with George W. Bush may find strength in knowing the president is a man of committed faith; whereas other people who disagree with president’s religious influence on his policies find his religiosity disturbing and annoying.

In a meeting with the American investigative journalist, Bob Woodward, George W.

Bush discussed his ideas regarding the War in Iraq, “I was praying for strength to do the Lord’s will...I’m surely not going to justify war based on God. Understand that.

Nevertheless, in my case I pray that I be as good a messenger of His will as possible” (qtd. in Woodward). His answer includes, as usual, religious terms such as, praying, Lord, God, messenger, and so on. When Woodward asked him whether he returned to his father, the former US President George Bush, to seek advice, Bush junior replied, “He is the wrong father to appeal to in terms of strength. . . There is a higher father that I appeal to” (qtd. in Woodward).

George W. Bush’s friends, a minister of Methodist church he belongs to in Dallas, Texas, and evangelical pastors generally portray in their meetings and discussions that George W. Bush is a true believer, whose language is, more or less, a mirror of his private beliefs. In a Christian talk show in Dallas, James Robison, a Texas preacher and spiritual advisor to George W. Bush said that he received a phone call from Gov. George W. Bush of Texas, asking for help in preparing the final presidential debate, through praying together for God to grant George W. Bush confidence, wisdom, and to know when and how to speak (Goodstein).

James Robison, once more regards George W. Bush’s references to God and Christ during presidential campaigns and public addresses as honest confessions, on a TV show, *Life Today*, he states, “I visited with him one day and realized that this man had an encounter with God that was so profound. He said a year or two ago that had he not had this encounter with God, he'd be sitting in a bar in Texas. But as a result of an encounter with God, he’s in the White House” (qtd. in “Texas Pastor...”); this passage aims to demonstrate to the American people that the president overcame his bad habits and that he was truly new person whose heart was full of faith and that was reflected publically through his overuse of religion in public speeches.

President George W. Bush turned toward religion every time he faced a challenge or doubted something in order to find guidance and comfort. When he was not sure about running for the presidency, he asked a number of ministers to pray over him, and after being determined to run for office, he looked for advice not only from presidential campaign advisors, but also from priests and Bible passages. George W. Bush, moreover, returned to some politicians secretly to know how to deal with his past drinking habits and drug use (Goodstein).

George W. Bush as usual used religious rhetoric to justify his own sin. When asked about his heavy drinking in interviews, he repeatedly referred to the same verse of the Bible that is about hypocrisy and sin, “I’m not going to try to take the speck out of your eye when I’ve got a log in my own” (qtd. in Kushiner). George W. Bush, in a phone interview paraphrased the New Testament verse from the book of Matthew, “The verse is a favorite”, since it asserts that every person is a sinner, he said he thought of his religious awakening as “one of the defining moments in my life, but I do so understanding that I am a lowly sinner, as well” (qtd. in Goodstein).

### **3.1.2 George Bush Goes “Religious” in his First Inaugural Address**

President George W. Bush delivered his first inaugural speech on 20 January 2001. It was a well-written address that presented his vision for his term in office; his speech gained a wide attention from his audience because he again referred to God many times (Kurtus). President George W. Bush announced that unity and justice were within reach, “because we are guided by a power larger than ourselves, who creates us equal in his image” (qtd. in “George W. Bush: Inaugural Address...”). George W. Bush in this declaration incorporates Genesis chapter 1 scripture regarding man having been created in “his own image” (verse 27, New International Version) with statements of equality and class (Kurtus).

George W. Bush, furthermore, referred in the second half of his inaugural speech to a



New Testament parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-27). He talked about how life sometimes calls us for great things (Roche), and quoted Mother Teresa, “A saint of our times”, having said, “We are called to do small things with great love” (qtd. in “Mother Teresa...”). All these religious references provide at angle did entity of the United States through alluding to God’s position in the foundation of American principles.

At the end of the Inaugural address, George W. Bush states, “our nation’s grand story of courage and its simple dream of dignity” (qtd. in “George W. Bush: Inaugural Address...”), but this story is not in the nation’s hand because as he suggests “we are not this story’s author” (qtd. in “George W. Bush: Inaugural Address...”), only God “who fills time and eternity with his purpose” has authored human lives (qtd. in “George W. Bush: Inaugural Address...”). These concluding remarks show that the nation’s future is in the hand of God, and using such statement by President George W. Bush gives him power as a man who submits to God who only has an authority over the future of United States.

George W. Bush delivered a speech at a national conference on faith-based and community initiatives in the White House because he always believed that the US government discriminated against social service organizations of faith and that the federal government throughout history has not acted fairly with faith-based programs because of the separation of church and state (Curry 136). He considers the following statement in the address:

We’re here to talk today about the relationship between people of faith and government policy. I believe it is in the national interest that government stand side-by-side with people of faith who work to change lives for the better.

I understand in the past, some in government have said government cannot stand side-by-side with people of faith. Let me put it more bluntly, government can’t spend money on religious programs simply because there’s a rabbi on the

board, [a] cross on the wall, or a crescent on the door. I viewed this as not only bad social policy, because policy by-passed the great works of compassion and healing that take place, I viewed it as discrimination. And we needed to change it. (qtd. in “America’s Compassion in Action”)

George W. Bush planned for state and local governments regarding the change in faith-based scheme which begins first on the federal level. He included the levels of government in his initiative plans in the conference of Mayors (Curry), he states, “I urge you to work with your governors to make sure that their faith-based offices are up and running, and that they help cut through the inherent prejudice toward faith programs, the inherent prejudice in government” (qtd. in “George W. Bush: Remarks...”). To avoid and eliminate prejudice and discrimination from his administration, he says, “The other thing the federal government must not do is worry about the role of faith-based programs in providing help to people in need. Let me put it a little more bluntly: the federal government should not discriminate against faith” (qtd. in “George W. Bush: Remarks...”).

George W. Bush justified the faith-based initiative in terms of historical discrimination, he argues, “We’ll never fund faith, we’ll never fund churches, but we should fund the armies of compassion. We should not discriminate against faith-based programs which exist to help people in need.” He adds, “When we fund programs, we ought not to discriminate against faith based programs. We’re [President Bush, Senator Lieberman, and Senator Santorum] in complete agreement that government should not discriminate against faith-based programs, but it should encourage them to flourish.”

### **3.2 George W. Bush’ Religious Rhetoric in the aftermath of the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks**

When terrorists attacked the American World Trade Center towers on 11 September 2001, 2,974 people lost their lives in the most significant terror attack to have ever occurred on US soil (Hubanks 200). Americans saw dramatic televised images of the twisted steel,

smoking wreckage, and collapsing towers. This attack had an equally considerable effect on the way in which the US nation and its politicians would talk about terrorism. President George W. Bush addressed the shocked nation via live television several times asking Americans to pray for the victims who had perished in that morning (Turek 2). All the speeches were rich with biblical references and religious imagery and had aimed to provide comfort and solace. In the evening of September 11, George W. Bush spoke from the Oval Office for only five minutes regarding the day's tragic events, concluding with:

Tonight I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened. And I pray they will be comforted by a power greater than any of us, spoken through the ages in Psalm 23: 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for you are with me.' This is a day when all Americans from every walk of life unite in our resolve for justice and peace. America has stood down enemies before, and we will do so this time. None of us will ever forget this day. Yet, we go forward to defend freedom and all that is good and just in our world. Thank you. Good night, and God bless America.

George W. Bush utilized the term "evil," which was pulled from Psalm 23, in the wake of the attacks, had a particular religious connotation. During the first week of October, when the president started talking about the reaction of the United States concerning the terrorist attacks, he used the term "evil" a lot of times. In a news conference, in the same week, the president referred directly to the term "evil" more than 12 times, generally when mentioning the "War on Terror" and the fight of good versus evil (Black 7). On November 2, he responded to a reporter's question, saying:

... I don't accept the excuse that poverty promotes evil. That's like saying

poor people are evil people. I disagree with that. Osama Bin Laden is an evil man. His heart has been so corrupted that he's willing to take innocent life. And we are fighting evil, and we will continue to fight evil, and we will not stop until we defeat evil.

The rhetorical relations between justice, freedom, and faith in Americans and God, drew by George W. Bush in this speech set the foreign policy agenda that described his terms in the oval office. In this speech and many others in the fall of 2001, Bush repeated religious themes, finding new expressions and phrases to cope with new national atmosphere (Turek). His presidency is often known by melding the religious and political standards, this is why his call to prayer and action on 9/11 looked like something familiar to citizens and neither striking nor shocking.

His former speechwriter, David Frum, explains the process of using religious terms:

The language of good and evil, central to the war on terrorism, came about naturally; the president used the term 'evildoers' to describe the terrorists because some commentators were wondering aloud whether the United States in some way deserved the attack visited upon it on September 11, 2001. He wanted to cut that off right way, "and make it clear that he saw absolutely no moral equivalence. So he reached right into the Psalms for that word. (qtd. in Black 4)

Religious language may have a serious impact and undesirable effect because it may increase the risk of terrorism on the United States and its allies. Even though President George W. Bush repeatedly referred to Islam as a peaceful religion, and explained many times that it was not a religious war or a war against Muslims, it was not sufficient for those who viewed the United States as a nation that desired a holy war against the "evildoers"

(Black). Also, the mentions of expressions like good versus evils Islamic terrorists might create backlash. As former Ambassador, Robert Seiple, warns, “demonization can produce hatred, and all of sudden, we’re heading toward a battle of civilizations” (qtd. in Lampman).

Three days after the terrorist attacks, Bush talked at the National Cathedral, he openly appealed to God, cited biblical passages many times, and also announced the day to be a national day of prayer and mourning for the victims. He finishes by:

On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask al-mighty God to watch over our nation and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. We pray that he will comfort and console those who now walk in sorrow. We thank him for each life we now must mourn and the promise of a life to come. As we have been assured, neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, can separate us from God’s love. May he bless the souls of the departed. May he comfort our own, and may He always guide our country. God bless America. (qtd. in “President Bush Addresses Prayer Service”)

The impact of Christianity on President George W. Bush seems broad and deep. He often evoked strong religious imagery and themes. Besides, George W. Bush’s farewell appeal for God’s blessing suggests that the President continued to rhetorically acknowledge the ability of God to direct the future and the Nation’s need for God’s blessing. President George W. Bush learned how to employ a calculated religious language when addressing the American citizens and in his foreign politics speeches as well. Consider five days after the terrorist attacks, he presented prepared and organized notes from the South Lawn after he arrived back to the White House (Black 10). He departed from his script to answer questions from reporters, clarifying, “This crusade, this war on terrorism is going to take a while” (qtd. in “Remarks by the President upon Arrival”). George W. Bush’s description of the war as a

“crusade” was shocking for worldwide audience. Despite the fact that he might have planned to say that, he did not escape harsh criticism of the public opinion (11). After this much-criticized statement, George W. Bush never used the word again in his public speeches.

Michael Gerson, George W. Bush’s chief speechwriter and a fellow Evangelist, often drew on gospel hymns that resonated profoundly among the faithful in his electoral base. Their common religious convictions are apparent in Bush’s speeches directly following 9/11; spoke of “axis of evil”, “good versus terrorism”, and the righteousness of God in a more open way. They emphasized ever more on the predestination of America as an agent of God in the war against terrorists represented by Saddam Hussein’s regime and terrorist networks (Stramer 2).

Many people claimed that George W. Bush took advantage of the 9/11 attacks to manipulate unfavorable public reactions to his policies. Welton Gaddy and Elaine Pagels, US religious scholars, believed that George W. Bush tried to make his policies an issue of morality and therefore, anyone who disagreed with his policies was in the moral wrong (Stramer 5). By labeling Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an axis of evil, he was by implicitly identifying himself as head of an axis of good: once more, make sure that the solely way to be morally right was to agree with him. Moreover, this kind of religious language in times of tension also facilitates the motivation of citizens to act aggressively, which is something simple to do if they believe that they occupy the moral high ground (Stramer 5).

Through his emotionally charged religious rhetoric in his political discourses, especially in the post 9/11 period, George W. Bush sought to increase support for the “War on Terror”, whereas simultaneously proclaiming that it was not a religious war. George W. Bush did not speak of religion explicitly as the reason behind the war; he rather considered the terrorist attacks as result of enemies’ fear of Western democracy, Western optimistic and positive values (Stramer 6). In other words, George W. Bush used his faith to emphasize that

God is with devout people and by his side and at the same time he implicitly tried to alienate Muslims and Islam.

On September 20, Bush delivered his address before Congress and the nation. He started by thanking US allies, Congress, and Americans for their support and perseverance during the hard times. In this speech, George W. Bush started with identifying the enemy, al Qaeda, “a collection of loosely affiliated terrorist organizations, practice a fringe form of Islamic extremism that has been rejected by Muslim scholars and the vast majority of Muslim clerics” (qtd. in “Text of George Bush’s Speech”). He explained why they had attacked the United States, and how America was obliged to respond to these attacks. George W. Bush separated Islamic Radicalism from mainstream Islam; he repeatedly referred to terrorists as having their own ideology without mentioning Islam:

I also want to speak tonight directly to Muslims throughout the world. We respect your faith. It's practiced freely by many millions of Americans and by millions more in countries that America counts as friends. Its teachings are good and peaceful, and those who commit evil in the name of Allah blaspheme the name of Allah. The terrorists are traitors to their own faith, trying, in effect, to hijack Islam itself. The enemy of America is not our many Muslim friends. It is not our many Arab friends. Our enemy is a radical network of terrorists and every government that supports them. (“George W. Bush Addresses...”)

This speech shows how the US president chose carefully the words he delivered to the public, so as to not turn this conflict into an open war between both Christianity and Islam. At the same time, the speech contains a contradiction. Despite this calculated deliberation notwithstanding, George W. Bush continued to employ religious rhetoric and biblical references to justify the military reaction. The obviously embedded contrast messages within

the president's speeches are not with "Islamic Radicalism", yet with Islam itself. As a result, it turned to be a religious war and not a war on terror (Stramer 6).

Steve Waldman, editor in chief in *belief net* commenting on George W. Bush's use of moralistic language, he explains that:

His use of terms like "evildoers" was important in conveying a sense of strength and certainty, and making Americans feel like he was clear. ... You have to feel certain that what you're doing is right, and that there's a moral cause to it. And so he was very unambiguous about it. He was very clear in using very moralistic language that we are fighting evildoers. I think that comes from his religious background, where obviously people who are very fluent with the Bible and are very religious, are comfortable using that kind of moral language. And I think it was also politically astute. It was a way of rallying Americans around a cause. (qtd. in "President and his Faith")

In expanding the war on terror to include Iraq, Bush employed securitizing speech acts to link Saddam Hussein with bin-Laden and thus the war in Iraq with the war, as confirmed in the subsequent interview. When a reporter asked George W. Bush if Saddam Hussein was a bigger threat to the United States than al Qaeda, Bush replied that there was no distinction between al Qaeda and Saddam when there was talk about the war on terror because both were equally bad, evil, and equally destructive. Through Bush's reaction, it is understood that he wanted to show that al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein were two faces of the same coin, and that there was a collaborative relationship between Iraq and al Qaeda, even with the fact that Bush has no proof that they had the same ideology and that there was much evidence to the contrary.

What is really surprising and frightening is that a large number of Americans let themselves be convinced that such a link existed; exactly 60% of the citizens say that they are



convinced that Iraq had supplied direct support to Bin Laden (Stramer 7). Although the extensive indications showed that Saddam Hussein was not cooperating with al Qaeda's terrorist network, there appeared the strength and power of the president's words and their impact on the citizens.

In his September 2002 speech, George W. Bush, like every time, did not hesitate to use his religion. In this occasion he quoted a Christological text when mentioning his war project, "And the light America has shone in the darkness [the enemies of America], and the darkness will not overcome it America shall conquer its enemies" (qtd. in "George Bush's Speech to the UN..."). When he showed up in a flight suit aboard the aircraft carrier *Abraham Lincoln*, he said to the troops: "And wherever you go, you carry a message of hope, a message that is ancient and ever new. In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'To the captives, come out! To those who are in darkness, be free'" (qtd. in "Text of George W. Bush's Speech...").

In his State of the Union Address in the following year, George W. Bush reconfirmed that history had called America and its allies to action (qtd. in "Text of President Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address"). Shortly after the terrorist attacks, speaking to a joint session of Congress, he overtly stated that the advance of human freedom, the great achievement of their time and the great hope of every time, now depended on them (qtd. in "Text: President Bush Addresses the Nation"). As he declared in his 2003 State of the Union address, the nation must go forth to "confound the designs of evil men" (qtd. in "The 2003 State of the Union Address..."), since "our calling, as a blessed country, is to make the world better" (qtd. in "The 2003 State of the Union Address..."). Once again, George W. Bush declared as war preparation was building up, "this nation and our friends are all that stand between a world at peace and a world of chaos and constant alarm. Once again, we are called to defend the safety of our people and the hopes of all mankind. And we accept this responsibility...and we go

forward with confidence, because this call of history has come to the right country” (qtd. in “The 2003 State of the Union Address...”).

After four months of US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, George W. Bush met a Palestinian delegation during the Israeli-Palestinian summit at Sharm el-Sheikh resort, a Palestinian foreign minister (“George W. Bush: God told me...”), Nabil Shaath says,

President Bush said to all of us: ‘I am driven with a mission from God’. God would tell me, ‘George go and fight these terrorists in Afghanistan’. And I did. And then God would tell me ‘George, go and end the tyranny in Iraq’. And I did. Bush went on: ‘And now, again, I feel God's words coming to me’, ‘Go get the Palestinians their state and get the Israelis their security, and get peace in the Middle East’. And, by God, I’m gonna do it. (qtd. in “George W. Bush: God Told me...”)

The Palestinian Prime Minister, Mahmoud Abbas, also attended the Sharm el-Sheikh delegation and restated to a BBC program, what George W. Bush said, “I have a moral and religious obligation. I must get you a Palestinian State. And I will” (qtd. in “George Bush: God Told me...”).

When George W. Bush tried to push his administration toward a war with Iraq, he faced a serious phase. When the president gave his 2003 State of the Union address to congress, Americans were more interested in the last words of the address. While disavowed by the administration about the assumed attempts of Iraq to buy uranium from Africa (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon*). Nevertheless, every piece that was crucial in constructing US public support for the war on terror was found in the few words of the president in the closing of the speech, “The liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity” (qtd. in “George W. Bush on Liberty...”). It was a brave connection of administration ambitions with divine desires, but

George W. Bush had the advantage of a platform built by more than two decades of religious politics.

George W. Bush, then, drove his message home, “We Americans have faith in ourselves, but not in ourselves alone. We do not know, we do not claim to know all the ways of Providence, yet we can trust in them, placing our confidence in the loving God behind all of life and all of history. May he guide us now. And may God continue to bless the United States of America” (qtd. in “George W. Bush on Liberty...”). Polls showed that 75% of US adults “approved” of Bush’s speech and 71% of registered voters said its content was “excellent” or “good.” Three weeks later, US adults were asked by pollsters, “Do you like the way George W. Bush talks in public about his religious beliefs, or does this bother you somewhat?” Fully 63% said they liked it (Domke and Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon*).

It is reasonable that American people will differ in their reactions and responses to George W. Bush’s appeals to religion, and many will judge his language through their own understandings and personal experiences with religion and people of faith. The majority of religious conservatives, those who have strong beliefs, and who are familiar with biblical references are more likely to welcome George W. Bush’s religious rhetoric than their secular counterparts. Religious people will recognize biblical passages, subtle references to hymns and other forms of Christian imagery. Whereas, those who have negative relationships with religion and religious people are highly sensitive toward this kind of language and think that religion should be purely private.

When understanding the different views of American society concerning biblical references and religious expressions used by President George W. Bush, it is noticeable that there were some possible influences of religious speech. As an example, in a poll conducted by American website *beliefnet.com* concerning the public responses to George W. Bush’s religious rhetoric, results demonstrate that more than a half of the sample like the religious openness of the

president and see it as an indication of successful leadership. Alternatively, about three of ten respondents criticize Bush's moral clarity and his too much talking about religion (Black).

### **3.3 George W. Bush's Religious Language Received both Praise and Criticism**

George W. Bush appreciated ministers' prayers for him that gave him the peace of mind and courage to run for the oval office. For a second time, before the inauguration of 1999, George W. Bush invited a number of ministers to the Fellowship Church in Grapevine, Texas, in order to quiz him about his understandings of the Bible and his views concerning religious issues, such as abortion, gay marriage, and race. The 15 ministers who were there said that he told them he was considering running for president (Goodstein), still he was worried about the influence of this decision on his family. He asked the ministers to pray for his wife and children. "I didn't feel like he was trying to sell us a bill of goods, but that he earnestly wanted our prayers" (qtd. in Goodstein), affirms Rev. Ed Young, Jr., pastor of the Fellowship Church. "I think he's a great representation of a true leader, because of his vision, because he's someone who believes in absolutes and he's not basing his life on relativism" (qtd. in Goodstein).

A lot of people admired George W. Bush's management in the post 9/11 period. Since the attacks on the United States, declares Tony Carnes in *Christianity Today*, "Bush has led the nation with a deft spiritual presence that radiates solidarity with people of all faiths" and "has competently stated religious and moral beliefs". Many viewed the catastrophe as "a spiritually defining moment for the country and its leader." Stephen Mansfield insisted that 9/11 prompted George W. Bush to talk more bravely about his religion and gave him greater self-confidence. "Bush's greatest gift to the country after September 11," asserts David Frum, "was his calm and self-restraint" (qtd. in Smith).

George W. Bush's use of religious language can also contribute to foreign criticism in numerous ways. Primarily, it may damage diplomatic plans and efforts. It is not necessary

that the religious language of the president plays a chief role overseas as at home, it may not resonate as obviously or efficiently as with the American people. Many audiences outside America can find it offensive (Black). One commentator, writing in the *New Statesman* newspaper, derided what he viewed as triumphalism in George W. Bush's rhetoric and drew the subsequent conclusion: "what is clear is that Europeans, steeped in their faith much longer than Americans, deeply resent Bush invoking God as America's policeman of the world, with Bush ... chosen by God to have absolute infallibility in all judgments" (qtd. in Black). Such negative interpretation evidently suggests that George W. Bush's exaggeration in using religion in political context evoke scorn in some areas, mainly abroad.

Although George W. Bush repeatedly called the separation of church and state during the beginning of his presidency a truly significant principle and sword to respect it, many blamed him for seeking to destroy the high wall between church and states. The executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, Barry Lynn argued that George W. Bush had "enormous difficulty separating his personal religious commitment from his public policy positions" (qtd. in Bulmiller). Richard Durbin, Illinois Senator, believes that "through his faith-based initiative, Bush is trying to change the balance between government and religion that our founding fathers struck over 200 years ago" (qtd. in Smith). New York Congressman Jerry Nadler says, "Again and again, this President has demonstrated that he doesn't understand the Constitution, or just doesn't care about it" (qtd. in "Faith-based Plan..."). "It bothers me that he wraps himself in a cloak of Christianity," says Lois Elieff, "It's not my idea of Christianity" (qtd. in D O'Connell).

Many commentators within the United States condemn Bush's use of religious imagery and have raised concerns about George W. Bush's public use of religion. Observers in other nations are even harsher in their criticism. For instance, writing for the *London Independent*, Rupert Cornwell presents his analysis of Bush's religiosity by contending that:

Abroad, where America's popularity is falling by the day, the risks are greater still ...Mr. Bush's Christian fervor only confirms suspicions that the looming war with Iraq is indeed a 'crusade' against Muslims, exactly as Osama bin Laden suggests. For world-weary Europe the Presidential language evokes mirth and queasiness in equal measure. A European leader who spoke in such terms would be laughed off the stage. an American one who speaks this way only increases the fear that the simplicities of faith, and a habit of seeing a hideously complicated world in a black-and-white, good or evil fashion, are a recipe for disaster.

In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, President George W. Bush's speeches were in a way or another offensive and coercive with the purpose of changing Americans' views and actions to support the war which contradicted with democratic norms (Hubanks). The academics and theorists, Douglas D. Kellner and John M. Murphy examined George W. Bush's religious rhetoric and his dependence on panic devices and threatening expressions as a tool to persuade the public opinion. Murphy claims, "Bush's discourse relied on topics of praise and blame rather than argumentation to make its case" (qtd. in Hubanks).

In his article "George W. Bush: Hypocrite or Fanatic," Joseph M. Knippenberg argues: How could anyone vote for George W. Bush? He's a hypocrite and a fanatic. Or a fanatical hypocrite. Or a hypocritical fanatic, Let me begin by offering the anybody but Bush crowd a piece of advice. The charges tend to cancel one another out. The problem with fanatics is precisely that they are true believers, not hypocrites. Their deeds track their speeches all too closely. But the problem with hypocrites is that they don't believe what they say. Their deeds belie their speeches. So perhaps the Democrats ought to choose one line of attack and stick with it.

To conclude, George W. Bush's faith has been vitally important through which he seeks specific political ends; the most crucial one is to convince citizens to believe in his leadership since God was supporting him and was by his side in every political decision. Since people of faith trusted God, they trusted George W. Bush as well because he took his power from him.

This chapter has affirmed that George W. Bush was deeply religious and had more than devotional life. His faith played a major role during his time in office and extensively influenced his leadership and decision-making. However, it is difficult to know whether the president used his faith and religious language as a genuine reflection to his convictions or only for partisan gain and public support. Therefore, the nature of president's faith and its influence on political actions are very likely to remain controversial.

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## Conclusion

The United States faces a unique dilemma when addressing the issue of religion in a political setting. The American Founding Fathers wisely put the first amendment to the US Constitution, mandating strict separation of religion and government to ensure religious freedom for all individuals and faiths. However, the influence of religion in politics is evident throughout the US history.

Despite the high wall between church and state erected in the First Amendment to the Constitution, US politicians are routinely asked about their religion and expected to make their religious convictions visible, to affirm their religious identity, and to employ broad religious themes in support of their political agendas. US politicians thus meet citizens' expectations and potentially improve people's perceptions of them by peppering their addresses with crafted religious signals. Presidents utilize scripture purposely in order to supply divine support for their own agenda and political actions as a whole, which provides an increase in their influential power with US citizens who are believers in God.

American politicians are purposely sharing their religious affiliations and beliefs and frequently use religious references and rhetoric when speaking in public. George W. Bush is among the most openly religious presidents in US history. He incorporated religion in his rhetorical execution in a manner different from his predecessors. He often talked about how Jesus changed his heart; he spoke, publicly and privately, of hearing God's call to run for the presidency and of praying for God's help since he had come into office.

Bush's personal religiosity and his use of religious rhetoric during his campaigns for the presidency and in his two terms in office have received extensive comment from the press as well as from scholars. George W. Bush viewed his own presidency as part of a divine plan. When terrorists attacked the United States on 11 September 2001, he formally addressed the nation via live television many times; all the speeches were rich with God-talk.

Almost all US politicians, throughout history have incorporated religion in their political discourses, through the use of moral and religious rhetoric presidents further their own purposes. Political leaders' appeals to religion served to enhance their popularity, win elections, pass a piece of legislation, prove their honesty, and increase support for their policies. Using God as a rhetorical support for president's decisions presents moral and ethical concerns in presidential rhetoric because the use of God as a rhetorical tool grants the president particular manipulative powers over any believers. It is also discovered that both explicit and implicit uses of Scripture, as well as verses that were directly quoted and those paraphrased in the inaugural speeches served to support the content of the presidents' inaugural speech and enhance perceptions about their leadership.

The analysis of several US presidents' rhetoric has demonstrated that religion had a larger effect on various presidents' political actions, worldviews, policies, and decision-making than is usually recognized. It is complicated, yet, to find out the role presidents play in crafting their communications and to what extent these speeches express their true beliefs and whether this use is a genuine reflection of honest religious beliefs or it is only a political strategy, one can never be sure about the actual faith commitments of any president.

George W. Bush's frequent use of God and biblical texts may seem relatively natural within the framework of US patriotic rhetoric, but within the configuration of events at the time the speeches were made, from the aftermath of 9/11 to the 2004 presidential campaign, the president wrung words out of their religious context to serve non-religious interests, which means that George W. Bush's Christian fervor confirms suspicions that the war with Iraq was indeed a "crusade" against Muslims. Although he generally avoided using the term "crusade" in a foreign policy speech, usage of other words with religious connotation confirms that.

Assessing George W. Bush's evolving use of religious rhetoric reveals that such

rhetoric from an American president supports the international perception of the United States as a “Christian nation,” this contradicts the spirit of the US Constitution and the Foundation principles of the United States. It can be concluded that George W. Bush employs religious rhetoric mainly for partisan gain, the best example is his willingness to appeal to his central base of evangelical voters and increase public support of the “war on terror.” That is to say, George W. Bush is a “holy hypocrite and “pious pretender” whose recourse to religious language was only a political strategy. He eventually represents the best sample when US presidents include persuasively religious rhetoric in order to successfully implement their political agendas. That is purely called tapping into religious rhetoric for the sake of promoting politics by a set of US chief executives. There are great expectations that this strategy will not cease to be adopted as it has always proven its effectiveness.

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